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KEEPERS OF THE FRAME

The Film Archives

PENELOPE HOUSTON

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE



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The British Film Institute exists to encourage the development of film, television and video in the United Kingdom, and to promote knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the culture of the moving image. Its activities include the National Film and Television Archive; the National Film Theatre; the Museum of the Moving Image; the London Film Festival; the production and distribution of film and video; funding and support for regional activities; Library and Information Services; Stills, Posters and Designs; Research; Publishing and Education; and the monthly *Sight and Sound* magazine

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INTRODUCTION

Fragile, Expensive and Dangerous

Years ago, I was sitting in a preview theatre idly waiting for a press show to get under way. My neighbour was one of our more distinguished critics, someone who had been writing about films with great perception and elegance for upwards of twenty years. As the lights dimmed, he leant over. He had been considering the question of how the picture actually arrived on the screen. Did I know about such things? He had noticed that there always seemed to be a beam of light coming from the back of the cinema. Might this perhaps have something to do with it?

This, admittedly, was an extreme case. This was a writer who could cope with the finer points of a film more readily than with some of the practical details of getting from place to place. But it is useful to be reminded occasionally of what film basically is. It's everything we always say it is: the entertainment medium which sometimes entertains, and the commercial property; on rare occasions the work of art; a significant part of the historical record; the way most of us have picked up rather more than we might like to acknowledge about the world and its twentieth-century doings, so that we travel as tourists checking up on what we expected to find rather than as adventurers, and have relied on the cameras for our images of war, from the bullock carts of the Boer War to the oil fires of the Gulf. The sounds and voices of films are as inescapably familiar as the images. *Round up the usual suspects... Nobody's perfect... I think it would be fun to run a newspaper...* One might uncomfortably suspect that more people would be able to identify such scraps of dialogue than could quote you the opening line of Wordsworth on Westminster Bridge or the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*. Films make up a major and enduring part of the collective memory of the century.

But film is also something that reaches the screen by way of a beam of light from a projector, and that has to be transported in bulky metal or plastic cans. The first century of cinema has seen the most spectacular advances in communications technology, in miniaturisation and the techniques for the storage and retrieval of information. But at the end of it, rather surprisingly, film itself remains much where it was at the beginning: the thin ribbon of images, housed on an unstable substance with less staying power than paper or parchment, spooled up and packed away in cans.

One day, it may all be on laser disc, and the purists among the world's film archivists may well protest in vain. But not yet. Back in the 1980s, one of the promises of high-definition television was that films would be beamed directly to

cinemas, if such places still existed; bypassing all the labour of making multiple prints and transporting them around the country. But this technology also remains just around the corner, not yet capable of delivering in ordinary working circumstances and on a cinema-size screen the quality expected from the best 35mm prints and projection.

Film is fragile, expensive to store, and can be dangerous. It began badly, with a fire in 1897 at the Paris Charity Bazaar which killed 180 people. Nitrate can ignite even in the care of archivists; there have been serious fires at, among other places, the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, Eastman House at Rochester, New York, and particularly disastrously, the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico City, when lives were lost and much of the Mexican film record burnt. In 1993 a nitrate fire at a laboratory in South London destroyed films from the National Film and Television Archive, among others. It takes a cynical archivist to argue, as some actually do, that fires and disasters make good publicity for their profession. But they are a reminder that nitrate, on which all feature films up to about 1950 were shot, is hazardous stuff, that preserving a film heritage is no easy business.

Everyone agrees that it should be kept, and when a popular film (or more often these days a television programme) turns out to have gone missing, there is usually a bit of an outcry. If you have regarded Dixon of Dock Green or Alf Garnett as part of your own past, you won't want to think that the BBC has been careless enough to mislay such relics. Most people probably have a vague sense that anything of significance made for either cinema or television is being kept in safe hands, without giving much thought – why should they? – to the problems and expense of keeping it, or the policies followed by those who take it in, inspect it, ticket it, stack it on shelves, and allow us to take it out and look at it now and again, if we can produce the proper credentials.

The film archivists belong to a young profession. There was nothing that could properly be called an archive until the mid-1930s, and in the early days there might have been some hesitancy about what they should call themselves. Ernest Lindgren was curator of the National Film Library when in 1948 he wrote an article for the *Penguin Film Review*. 'The word "archive" rings with a deathly sound in the world of cinema, which is so young and vital and dynamic, eager for the future and impatient of the past,' he wrote with a certain wistfulness. But eight years later, when middle-aged and tired might have seemed more appropriate adjectives for cinema itself than young and vital, the Library had become the National Film Archive (and remained so until 1993, when it recognised its expanded concerns by changing its name to the National Film and Television Archive).^{*} The word library suggests books; the film libraries so-called mostly exist for commercial purposes – stockshot, newsreel and so on. To maintain an often precarious and difficult relationship with the film industry, the archives had to demonstrate their distance from the profit motive, from any suggestion that

^{*} At the risk of some confusion, but unavoidably, the Archive is referred to by all three of its names, according to the period under discussion.

they might intend to lend out films for money. They chose a name which suggested solidity and safe-keeping. ✓

The preservationists in the archives occupy the moral high ground: their work is fundamental, the bedrock on which everything else rests, and they know it. Unfortunately, they can hardly hope to make it seem dramatic or exciting, although to visit vaults cut into a mountainside or built like cathedrals for cinema, with the stuff of legend piled high above one's head, is at least exhilarating. But as the film archives have grown in confidence, which was essentially a development of the 1980s, have acquired greater official recognition and improved their relationships with the world's film industries, they have also run up against the decline in public service values, privatisation, the recession and the efforts everywhere to reduce public spending. Preservation is the costly and least visible part of the exercise, with nothing much on the surface to show for itself. The demand has been that the archives should be seen to justify their existence by bringing out their films. They feel that they must be seen to be doing something, whatever that something might be. In the late twentieth century there is probably no archive, however small or poorly funded or ill-equipped for showing anything to anyone, which would dare to proclaim that its one concern is with the well-being and proper storage of its collection.

This relatively recent change of emphasis follows a long period in which the archivists were extremely poor publicists for their own cause. (In many ways they still are, being unused to thinking in such terms.) Their problem has always been that they were not the proprietors of most of the material in their care. Film companies presented them with prints of films, but on strict conditions and with limitations on what could be done with them in the way of copying and screening. The rights remained with the donors of the films, or whoever inherited or acquired them, and any suggestion that archives were exploiting their holdings for their own benefit could have been followed by swift reprisals. Companies can, and do, remove their films from the archives, for all sorts of reasons, because they are still *their* films. Also, every archive probably has some material of uncertain provenance, films picked up from private collectors or from outside the system of heavily policed industry control. The safest policy was to keep quiet and attract no unwelcome attention. Undoubtedly, the development of the film archive movement was held back by fear, by an apprehension, often but by no means always justified, that any rash move might jeopardise the all-important relationship with the film trade. In the last decade they have emerged, as it were, from hiding. ✓

The archives have also tended to say nothing much about situations which they knew they could not change. It took Martin Scorsese to alert both the general public and his fellow film-makers to the hazards of colour fading. The archivists could have trumpeted the case as loudly – though probably nothing like as effectively – if they had cared to. Their own attention, however, was focused on the job of copying their nitrate holdings, transferring to acetate stock films which they thought were unlikely to survive beyond the end of this

✓ century. It is immensely more expensive to ensure the preservation of colour films, and to have started a hare in this direction might merely have aroused expectations which they could not hope to satisfy.

✓ It has been much the same, more recently, with the vinegar syndrome, the name given to a new and unexpected hazard which only began to show itself as far as the Western archives were concerned in the late 1980s. When cans of film from the 1950s and 60s (post-nitrate, in other words) were opened, a few gave off a strong whiff of vinegar. This was the first sign that decay was setting in, although it had always been assumed that acetate was altogether more durable than the nitrate it had replaced. In working on this book, I have found that many people outside the film world are well aware of the problems posed by nitrate: that it's unstable, highly inflammable, burns ferociously if it takes fire, has to be stored in special conditions, and so on. But no one in the outside world, and not too many of the film-makers and critics I spoke to, had even heard the expression vinegar syndrome.

It is no wonder, in this case, that the archivists have kept quiet. Since the 1940s, those archives which have had the means have been copying their nitrate holdings on to acetate, as the originals came to the end of their life. They had, and still have, no choice. If a nitrate film is to be preserved beyond the death of the original print or negative, it must be copied on to a substance which, it is now known, may prove to be equally short-lived. The symptoms do not as yet affect many films, and there are reassurances that prints made by the archives themselves and always properly stored have a much better survival rate than those which have been given a rough time in cinemas. But undoubtedly the discovery of the vinegar syndrome shifted the ground under the archivists' feet. It showed, if nothing else, how difficult it must always be to predict anything with certainty in an area where the materials themselves are less than a century old.

✓ There have been many changes in the situation of the film archives since the mid-1980s, and in what is very much an international movement they seem to apply to the larger and more settled archives throughout the world. There is much talk everywhere about the 'film heritage', the 'cultural patrimony' and the need to ensure its preservation. At the same time, partly because the archives have kept themselves to themselves, there is little general awareness about the history of the archive movement, about its many current problems, or about preservation policies which have been almost exclusively concentrated on the first fifty years of cinema, the nitrate era. The thinking behind this book is that these are matters of public concern, that since there is a 'heritage' at stake, it would be an advantage to know a little more about what is happening to it.

From the early 1930s, when the archive movement was just stirring into life, there were people who realised that they were embarking on an undertaking which could not be sustained effectively without public funding. The National Film Library, as it then was, had to keep going in its early years on a budget which now looks nothing short of pathetic; but it was public money, giving some assurance of continuity. The Library, like the British Film Institute of which it has always been a part, was essentially a creation of the 1930s and of the public service

ideals of that age. It could be seen as some sort of tiny relation of the BBC; it was a contemporary of the GPO Film Unit.

In the economic and cultural climate of the 1990s, a dilemma for the archives is that they can hardly be regarded as likely candidates for privatisation. However hard they work to make their activities seem more openly attractive to the public, by offering greater access, by pursuing the popular role of producing handsomely restored versions of classic films, they are still stuck with the cost of film (and television) preservation. This is an expensive business; and bound to become even more so.

All around the world, however, public resources have been harder to come by. The East European archives, once safely entrenched within state cinema complexes and so well provided for, were thrown out into the cold with the collapse of the systems which supported them. In America, near-bankrupt city administrations have no longer been able to offer funding. The archives may find themselves increasingly thrown back on the need to attract sponsorship (which is also a declining resource, since the lavish days of the 1980s). The temptation will be to concentrate on the showcase activities, such as film restoration, which show them in their brightest light. They cannot, as an art gallery might do, simply clamp down for a year or two on new acquisitions. The flow of material keeps coming, as more and more companies and organisations appreciate the virtue of having their films stored securely – and, it has to be said, at public expense. And the nitrate film still has to be copied to meet its expiry deadline.

If I have somewhat concentrated in this book on the National Film and Television Archive, this is not because I regard it as typical. Several people warned me, with reason, that there was no such thing as a 'typical' archive. The hundred or so organisations which are members of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) may face many of the same problems, but they are not necessarily finding the same solutions, or even looking for them. They vary too much in their origins, scale, structures, funding and the state of development they have reached. Many archives exist independently, but many do not. An archive may be part of a film institute, as in Britain and Sweden (though the two institutes are also very different in their aims and policies); it may be attached to a university (UCLA) or a museum (the departments of film at the Imperial War Museum in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York). It is bound to take some of its institutional tone from its surroundings.

The National Film and Television Archive is my home base; I could not have looked into the workings of any other organisation in such detail. But the main reason for concentrating on its history and operations is its standing within the archive movement. Ironically, for a country whose film industry seems to have spent most of its existence staggering defiantly between crises, Britain's film archive is among the most stable, principled and highly regarded. And this has always been the case. It was one of the tiny, elite group founded before the war, when people had only recently come to realise that feature films merited preservation. It has enjoyed rare continuity of management: in almost sixty years, it has had only three curators, Ernest Lindgren, David Francis and Clyde Jeavons, and

both Francis and Jeavons had served their time under Lindgren before leaving the Archive and later returning to head it. David Francis went on to run the department of film at the Library of Congress in Washington, a unique double.

Ernest Lindgren has been described as the man who invented the science (or art) of film archiving, and also as the conscience of FIAF. For most of his career, he suffered from living in the shadow of his great rival, Henri Langlois, founder of the Cinémathèque Française. Langlois was the man of legend, the flawed angel of the archive movement (though by some barely considered an archivist at all), who knew everything there was to know about films, loved them immoderately, and by way of his brilliant programming helped to nurture and educate the New Wave generation. They in turn enhanced his glory by proclaiming themselves 'Children of the Cinémathèque'. Ernest Lindgren, by contrast, seemed staid and drab and bureaucratic, someone who would rather keep his films under lock and key. The comparison had to be damning.

At the end of the day, however, there can be no real doubt where the balance of advantage lies. Langlois created a kind of personal marvel, but left behind him a legacy of confusion and mistrust which held up the development of the French archives and kept France largely isolated from the international movement. Lindgren had been patiently constructing an institution, put together to last. The major and significant developments have happened since their deaths (or, as David Francis rather brutally put it to me, 'the good things happened after the characters left'), but they largely depended on the ground rules and the solid base laid down by Lindgren.

I should add that I am not an archivist, and this is a book written from outside a world which is itself something of an enclave within the film community. I have talked to a great many people, inside and outside the archive movement, and been able to sample the workings of FIAF by attending one of its annual congresses. I have learnt a lot and am grateful to all my instructors – though my conclusions of course are my own.

There seems to be a notion in some quarters that there was some golden age of archiving, now in the past. Anthony Slide, in his book on the American archives, *Nitrate Won't Wait*, writes irately about a new generation of 'archival bureaucrats . . . not interested in film preservation, only in self-preservation'. I am not qualified to judge whether this is in fact the American experience, but if such faceless people exist I have been lucky enough to avoid meeting them. My impression is that there is still plenty of dynamism left in the archive movement – and that with the mixture of difficulties and opportunities confronting it, there will need to be.

An archive story. Once upon a time, one of the veterans of the archive movement was chatting to his old friend, Henri Langlois. His nitrate vaults were full to overflowing, what could he do with the films? 'Why don't you dig a hole and bury them?' suggested Langlois. This was duly done: the hole was dug, some films interred, the whole thing covered up again. In the catalogue of the archive, the reference was to 'earth vaults'. Some people thought that the grass grew more lushly, the flowers bloomed more brightly in the area where the films were

stored. It was some six or seven years before they thought they had better take a look at what was going on. The 'earth vaults' were excavated. Gas fumed unpleasantly out of the hole; they looked down on some rusty cans and tattered shards of nitrate. The site was quickly covered over again. The flowers continued to bloom as handsomely.

I am assured on the authority of someone who was present at the exhumation that this tall tale is true, that I could name with impunity the archivist concerned, who is still alive. I prefer to think of it, however, as a kind of parable for the sometimes curious world of the film archivists, where so many decisions have to be taken on trust.

A NEW SOURCE OF HISTORY

'The cinema is an invention without a future,' announced the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis, some time after they had launched the whole thing with their first public screening at the Grand Café in Paris, on 28 December 1895. Georges Méliès was warned off in these terms when he tried to buy the patents from them. And if they thought cinema likely to prove no more than a showman's passing attraction, they would hardly have seen any prospect of permanence for their own tiny films: the cinema's first train arriving at La Ciotat, steaming towards the camera and into history, the baby at his breakfast, the factory workers heading home after the day's shift. The only magic at the time was that people and objects were seen to move; the magic ever since has been in those first, far from fumbling efforts to put the camera in the right place; even more, in the unforced, quite undramatic glimpses into the most ordinary moments of ordinary people's lives. The baby, the breakfast, the bicyclists and bustling women, the station platform on that particular day, remain trapped in time forever, or as long as anyone considers anything on film worth keeping.

The invention without a future rather rapidly began to acquire a past. Almost from the beginning, there were people who realised that there might be something in films of future interest: film-makers, that is, who saw that news value might become historical value, even if only in the cause of promoting their own work. I am indebted to the film historian Stephen Bottomore for two cuttings from the magazine *Photographic News*. The first, dated 18 December 1896, reported that R. W. Paul, the British pioneer, had offered the British Museum several of his 'cinematograph reproductions' – scenes of the Epsom Derby won by the Prince of Wales' horse, of Princess Maud's wedding, of London streets. The Museum was said to be rather perplexed about what to do, not in the habit of rejecting gifts but undecided about where to house this novel present. By the time of *Photographic News*' second story, on 12 February 1897, they had managed to make up their minds: they would take Paul's films and put them in the Department of Prints and Drawings. Stephen Bottomore asked the Museum if they knew anything more about this transaction, but they did not. If they had shown rather more enthusiasm and alacrity in 1896, of course, there might never have been a National Film Archive, merely another department of the British Museum. Paul's film of the 1896 Derby, incidentally, found its way to the Science Museum, where it still is. The print held by the NFTA, long assumed to be the 1896 race, is now thought more likely to be the Derby of 1898.



La Sortie des Usines Lumière

Then in March 1898, out of a clear sky and with the cinéma still months short of its official third birthday, came a paper which must rank as one of the most unexpected and remarkable in film history: a considered, reasoned proposal for the creation of a film archive. The author was a Polish camera operator, Boleslaw Matuszewski; his pamphlet was printed in Paris and titled '*Une nouvelle source de l'histoire*'.

Boleslaw Matuszewski had grasped a point which surprisingly few twentieth-century historians have wanted to take up: the value and potential of film as historical evidence, as a primary source in its own right. He admitted the disadvantage recognised by all later commentators, that most filmed history was bound to be staged history, 'ceremonies arranged in advance and posed in front of the camera'. The 'beginnings of action, the first movements, the unexpected things happen beyond the range of the camera – just as they escape other means of communication.' But he trusted the resourcefulness of his fellow cameramen, to direct them to the places where history was about to be made and where authority might prefer them not to go. Even in war, cameras could be carried into action, held like guns, and could capture at least a fragment of the battle. He had great faith in film: 'The camera will not perhaps give us the complete history, but at least what it gives us will be incontestable and absolutely true. . . It has a quality of authenticity, exactitude and precision which is unique to it. It is the honest and infallible eye witness.'

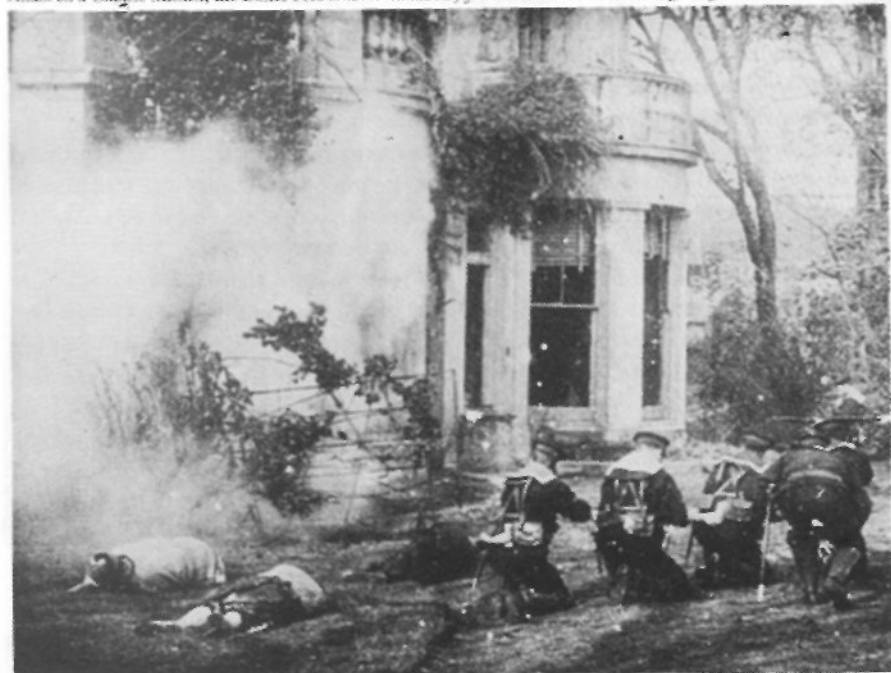
Here he was perhaps somewhat carried away, in his confidence that film evidence would remain inviolate where still photographs could so easily be tampered with or retouched. A fair number of the early 'actuality' films were in

any case faked with various degrees of ingenuity, from the blatant concoction of a Dreyfus Case film put together by Francis Doublier in 1898 to the Boxer Rebellion episode staged by the film-maker in his own comfortably suburban garden. Although such exercises, which could hardly have taken in a ten-year-old, were presumably always intended to be read as illustrations of the news, rather than the news itself.

Matuszewski's archive would not, of course, have had any truck with such material. He suggested that it should be attached to one of the great French institutions, such as the Bibliothèque Nationale or the Museum at Versailles. 'It is necessary to give this source, perhaps a privileged one, the same authority, the same official existence and the same possibilities as the other recognised archives.' He wanted a selection committee to choose the material considered worthy of preservation. The negatives were then to be catalogued and kept locked away in sealed cans. Prints would be made available on conditions to be determined by the committee, though he envisaged that some material might have to be embargoed for a number of years.

His own instinct, however, was all for availability. How pleasant it would be for schoolchildren to watch the passing parade of history, the changing faces of cities, rather than having to make do with a few lines of 'vague description' in books. He had shown one of his own films, shot in Russia, to soldiers at a Paris barracks, and been 'surprised and charmed' at the way they reacted to the unfamiliar sights and ceremonies. He took into account that the equipment for

Attack on a Chinese Mission, the Boxer Rebellion film shot by James Williamson in an English garden.



making and showing films was expensive, but it was steadily coming down in price and might soon be expected to reach a point where even amateurs could afford it, 'and would like nothing better than to contribute to the making of history.' Sooner or later, he was convinced, some major European city would establish such an archive: he was offering Paris the chance to be first.

Matuszewski readily admitted his self-interest. He had filmed the visit of the President of France to St Petersburg in 1897, and incidentally encountered his own proof of film's value as evidence. President Faure was said in some quarters to have been guilty of a breach of etiquette (failing to take off his hat while reviewing a guard of honour, or something of the sort); Matuszewski's film showed that Faure had behaved quite correctly. He had also been a cameraman at Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and had other films he had shot in Russia. This material was on offer to the new archive, and he was prepared to go out and shoot more. And, indeed, did so. Later in 1898, he is said to have shown medical men in Warsaw film of an operation carried out by a leading Paris surgeon, shot in a hospital using only natural light.

If the proposal could be seen in one sense as Matuszewski's effort to advance his own work, in the best tradition of the energetic early entrepreneurs, it was an extraordinarily far-sighted and ingenious one. What makes it so especially captivating is its practicality and detail. No one, of course, showed any serious interest in following up the plan, and Matuszewski himself seems to have disappeared from the record as abruptly as he arrived. At the Pordenone Festival in 1992, I met two Polish researchers who had been inquiring into his life. He was back in Paris, it seems, during 1901, but after that they had been unable to find any further trace of him.

It was a long time before anyone would consider keeping films for anything other than historical record purposes. There were many other suggestions over the years, though nothing as thorough and as lucid as Matuszewski's plan. In a second paper, mainly concerned with the possible use of film for military, scientific and educational purposes, even he recognised that the established organisations would be in no hurry to see the value of a new kind of record: 'I have no illusions that my project will quickly be made effective.'

In 1916, *The Times* reviewed *The Battle of the Somme*, that absorbing mixture of actuality and reconstruction, so pillaged for compilation films that people who have never seen the original have still taken from it much of their sense of the landscape of the trenches. 'In later years,' wrote the reviewer, 'when historians want to know the conditions under which the great offensive was launched, they will only have to send for these films and a complete idea of the situation will be revealed before their eyes – for we take it for granted that a number of copies of them will be carefully preserved in the national archives.'

A year later, the Imperial War Museum was conceived, in that same spirit of commemoration which led to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and a war memorial on every village green. From the first, it was intended that the Museum would keep the official war films, such as *The Battle of the Somme*, along with all its other records, including the collection of paintings by war

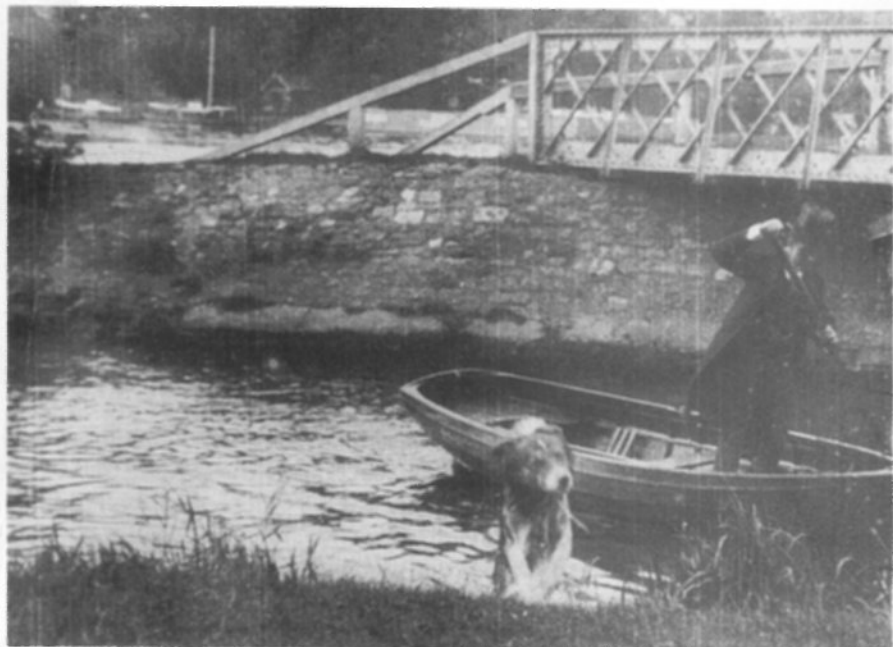
artists. The Department of Film at the IWM consequently ranks as the oldest British film archive, though in the early years the problem for both the Museum and the film collection was that it had no proper home. 'The collection has a continuous history, but the archive as such doesn't,' said Roger Smither, Keeper of the Department of Film, to whom I'm grateful for information on the IWM's history. The Museum was lodged for a time at Crystal Palace, then in Kensington. It was many years before it settled in its splendid permanent quarters, the old Bedlam Hospital in Lambeth Road. The film collection itself was actually housed for much of the time at the War Office, under the supervision of a part-time custodian, E. Foxen Cooper, who was also cinematograph adviser to the government.

Foxen Cooper would seem to have had all the instincts of an archivist, even without a solidly based archive to manage. Long before the National Film Library (came into existence), he took advice from Kodak about the proper conditions for film storage and treatment, and established practices which, according to Roger Smither, 'do not significantly differ from standards still observed in modern film archives.' He proposed (unsuccessfully) that the IWM should take charge of the preservation of all films of historical interest, and in 1929 he wrote a long article about the historical value of films for *The Times* (attributed only to 'A Correspondent', but known to be by Foxen Cooper).

For Foxen Cooper, as for Matuszewski, the film record represented truth; and truth, as he pointed out, was often arrived at largely by accident:

The Battle of the Somme. Courtesy of Imperial War Museum. (neg. IWM FILM 1672.)





Rescued by Rover.

Two different versions of the same scene, from prints held in the NFTVA.

A peculiar feature of the few film records that do exist today and that are considered worthy of preservation is that each one of them appears to have been photographed without any intention of its becoming the record of a historical event. . . . They were placed before the public as items of picture news, and their existence today is a chance incident. . . . So the films which up to now have been considered worthy of perpetual preservation are often those which have been obtained with the least financial outlay, though again and again at great risk of life. There was no synopsis prepared, no producer employed, no artist selected, and no special scenery provided. The occasion was a day in the life of a nation, and the recorder merely a cinema operator.

Foxen Cooper argued a case for the preservation of all kinds of factual film records, as a 'national work at the public expense'. 'Future generations will probably be just as interested in seeing how we lived our everyday lives and enjoyed our sports as they will be to see how we fought our battles and heroically met death.' He thought it would be a good idea to preserve films about birds and animals. And, in one short paragraph of this lengthy article, he noted that there had been as yet 'no general desire' to keep feature films. 'Perhaps one day some international society with sufficient means at its disposal will form a library of the great films belonging to the various periods since cinematography came into being . . . if the negatives are still in existence.'

'If the negatives are still in existence...' An enormous number of them were not, even by 1929. It is generally assumed that some 75 to 80 per cent of all silent cinema has been lost, most of it gone beyond recall unless caches still exist in the unexplored recesses of the archives or in the holdings of private collectors. And most of this destruction happened before the first feature film archives came into existence in the mid-1930s. All archivists have a powerful sentimental attachment to silent cinema, a determination to hold on to any scrap that comes their way, however trivial or rudimentary. They see it as their role to try to make up for the sins of the past, the history of loss and neglect. They are in the business of salvage, without looking to many of its material rewards.

Films disappeared because no one considered it worth the trouble of keeping them after they had served their short time in the cinemas. Efforts were made to hold on to anything with long-term reissue value, but much of the rest slid quietly out of circulation. They were made in all sorts of conditions by all sorts of small companies. The companies went out of business; the laboratories in which the original negatives were stored went broke, or the negatives were worn out by being used as a source of new copies. The National Film and Television Archive, for instance, has three prints of Cecil Hepworth's *Rescued by Rover* (1905), each slightly different. The assumption is that as more prints were needed and the original negative was no longer serviceable, they simply went out and shot the film again.

In the 1980s, archivists were asked to name the films they would most like to recover, and the exercise threw up a sorry tale of losses around the world. Among the titles: *Alam Ata* (1931), the first Indian talkie; *Evangelina* (1913), the

first Canadian-made feature, of which only part survives; *The Battle of New Zealand* (1921), the first New Zealand feature; *El Apostol* (1917), made in Argentina and thought to be the first feature-length animated film made anywhere; the Australian *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906); the Mexican *Revolución Zapatista* (1914). Not to mention the one missing Garbo (*The Divine Woman*), the one missing Hitchcock (*The Mountain Eagle*), and the lost films by Lubitsch and Murnau and Sternberg and so many others.

This destruction of great tracts of silent cinema was usually a matter of accident rather than design. Producers would not deliberately have killed their own creations, Henri Langlois always insisted; but neither would they have gone out of their way to preserve them. Of later Hollywood attitudes, Langlois joked that producers cherished their collections of often worthless modern paintings while throwing away the real treasures – their films. The whole system of film distribution was also no help to survival. The distributors have always held the central power within the film industry, as the pivot on which the business turns. They have been able to dictate terms to exhibitors and bully producers – and the fact that a single company could function as producer, distributor and exhibitor has not affected this basic balance of power. For the distributors, it was a key principle that all films should always remain within the system and under their control. Outside were assumed to lurk the pirates and predators, ready to snatch the films and profit by them if the distributors relaxed their grip.

It was partly as a consequence of this sense of permanent unease that the destruction of the large number of prints made for a film's initial release became standard industry practice. This also made sound business sense. Scrap merchants and junkmen would take the prints for the small value of the silver that could be extracted from them. (Films were sold off by weight; and in the mid-1930s the metal in the average feature was said to be worth about ten shillings [50 pence].) The alternative was expensive storage of prints unlikely to be needed again, with the risk that copies might wander out of safe-keeping. Consequently, if the original negative and the small number of prints kept for reference and possible reissue went missing, there was unlikely to be much back-up from release prints still in circulation.

The major studios for the most part held on to their material: proud companies such as Gaumont or Disney would not have thrown their own history away. Another source of survival, for the pre-1914 American cinema, was the collection of paper prints (rolls of paper prints of the original negatives) which had been deposited in the Library of Congress for copyright registration and from which it was possible laboriously to re-photograph the original films. (In later years, it was enough for the producers to register copyright by depositing scripts and stills, until from 1942 the Library had the storage space to take in the films themselves.)

Even so, it can seem surprising not that so much silent cinema has vanished, but rather that so much has lasted. The most vulnerable material, the little comedies and travelogues and one-reelers from the early days which there was no real

reason for anyone to keep, still found their way into the hands of collectors, people who from the cinema's beginnings snapped up the unconsidered trifles that landed up on street market stalls, were left behind by travelling showmen or abandoned in derelict cinemas.

One such collector, perhaps the most extraordinary of them all, and one who acquired his films by more legitimate means, was a Swiss Jesuit priest, the Abbé Joye, who by 1910 had managed to assemble some 2,000 films. Ostensibly, Joye was using his material for teaching, though he was more probably simply one of the first of the passionate, indefatigable collectors. He died in 1919, after which his films were left to languish away, in time to begin rotting. Eventually, the Jesuits offered them to the Cinémathèque Suisse, which felt that the problems they presented were more than a small archive could handle. In due course, like so much else, the collection reached the National Film Archive. The Abbé Joye was not alone: he merely gathered in more films, more assiduously, than anyone else at the time. For the film industry, however, all collectors were potential pirates, infiltrators of their closed system, even though only the very astute or the very lucky could have got much out of their haul beyond the enjoyment of ownership. The professional pirates were another matter, dealing in the markets in areas such as the Middle East or Africa where Hollywood's writ did not run.

The arrival of sound cinema saw major and now deliberate destruction of silent prints and negatives, junking of a kind not to be repeated until the early 1950s, when nitrate gave way to acetate as the material for film-making and the industry again saw reason to dispose, though much less drastically, of outdated wares. By the 1950s, however, the archives were there to mount rescue operations. In 1930 or thereabouts, the films simply disappeared. Sound conquered the film business more swiftly and more totally than anyone had probably foreseen, and within a very short period it became clear that silent films might as well be written off as a commercial asset. They were not going to make a comeback, or survive as a small enclave within the industry: the decks were cleared for sound.

It is often assumed to have been the sudden death of silent cinema that within a few years brought the first film archives into existence. There had been a number of earlier suggestions that feature films should be collected and preserved, some as tentative as that put forward by Foxen Cooper, many more positive. In his useful book *Les Cinémathèques*, Raymond Borde lists several such projects, and although he concentrated on France he recognised that there must have been others elsewhere. But the departure of silent cinema meant the end of its acting styles, its whole evolved tradition of story-telling and symbolism. It was impossible that there should not be a demand for the preservation of the cinema everyone had grown up with, the first thirty years of what was already recognised as the art form of the twentieth century.

If one looks at the nature of the first film archives, however, it begins to seem that their founding can hardly be explained by quite such an easy generalisation. The first European archive was actually launched in 1933 in Sweden, by Bengt Idestam Almqvist, who also wrote about films under the name Robin

Hood. For some reason, perhaps because it was seen as something of a private collection, this forerunner of the Swedish Film Institute was not included among the original Big Four, the founders of the International Federation of Film Archives. These were the Reichsfilmarchiv (Berlin, 1935), the Museum of Modern Art Film Library (New York, 1935), the National Film Library (London, 1935) and the Cinémathèque Française (Paris, 1936). These four archives were founded by very different organisations and people, for very different purposes. They reflect not so much the unity of the archive movement – that was to be built up gradually over many years – as its startling diversity. None of them had anything specifically to do with the task of preserving silent cinema. They took their character from national attitudes to cinema, methods of funding, views about public service; even more, they reflected the tastes and passions and working methods of the people who created them.

The Reichsfilmarchiv was a state archive, the creation of a regime which had a clearer and sharper understanding than any other in history of the uses and potential of film. Hitler attended its inaugural ceremony, in February 1935. The Nazis used film for demonstrations of authority and national unity (*Triumph of the Will*), for international prestige (*Olympia*), for intimidation (*Baptism of Fire*). Inevitably, their plans for the Thousand Year Reich included a storehouse for national cinema. At a time when the other archives were struggling to launch themselves on tiny budgets, the Reichsfilmarchiv was securely financed, assured of proper storage conditions for its collection. The archive did not, of course, survive the war; its collection was broken up, with the bulk of it finding its way to East Germany.

The Museum of Modern Art also acquired its Film Library (as the present Department of Film was then called) in 1935, although the Museum's founder, Alfred Barr Jr, had for some years been trying to persuade his trustees that film should be added to their responsibilities. Funding for the venture came from a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. The Library was launched with a statement by the President of the Museum:

The art of the motion picture is the only art peculiar to the twentieth century. As an art it is practically unknown and unstudied. . . . This new and living form of expression, a vital force in our time, is such a young art that it can be studied from its beginnings; the 'primitives' among the movies are only forty years old. Yet the bulk of all films that are important historically or aesthetically, whether foreign or domestic, old or new, are invisible under existing conditions. <To preserve these films and make them available to the public for study and research is the aim of the new Film Library.>

From the outset, the Library's emphasis was therefore on the study of films, not simply their preservation. By 1939 it had acquired its own theatre. Through the work of its distribution library, it was to send out films at low cost to film societies and universities, making it a major force behind the development of film education in the United States. All of which was in line with the thinking of its first

curator, the chirpy and courageous 'Birmingham Sparrow' (as Ivor Montagu described her in his *Sight and Sound* obituary), Iris Barry.

Born in Birmingham in 1895, and educated partly at a convent in Belgium, Iris Barry had done clerical work at the Ministry of Munitions during the First World War. She submitted a poem, successfully, to Ezra Pound's *Chicago* magazine and gloated over the fee, 'an amazing cheque for £14'. She was 'interested in films to a degree which most of my friends regarded as eccentricity or mania', wrote about them for the *Spectator* and the *Daily Mail*, and in 1925 opened the door of her Bloomsbury flat to find the young Ivor Montagu on the doorstep, calling to consult her about setting up the Film Society. By the early 1930s, she had moved to New York and was taken on by MOMA as a librarian. It was Alfred Barr who, in the words of Alistair Cooke's *New York Times* obituary of her, 'thought she would be better employed doing something about the film collection.' Her own taste was bracingly eclectic – she is on record, for instance, as preferring John Ford's *The Prisoner of Shark Island* to *The Informer*, against all the trends of the time.

In her search for films, Iris Barry did something which would probably never have occurred to the other novice archivists, even if they had had the style or the opportunity to carry it off: she laid siege to Hollywood. With the backing of John

Iris Barry



Hay Whitney, a trustee of the Museum and first president of the Library, she and her husband John Abbott (the Library's manager, but by all accounts no match for his wife in flair and resolution) set off for California. In August 1935, a grand reception was held at Pickfair: Whitney and the Abbotts aimed for the top. They were able to offer the rulers of Hollywood what that insecure industry has always wanted, cultural respectability, the assurance that their work was seen as having permanent value. Once they had persuaded two of the majors, Paramount and Metro Goldwyn Mayer, to agree terms with the Museum, most of the other companies were prepared to fall into line.

Having scored this notable triumph, Iris Barry showed her Napoleonic spirit by embarking almost immediately on the conquest of Europe. Her papers, preserved at the Museum of Modern Art, include her report on her travels. In England, the Abbotts were met off the boat by Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester, but complained that it was Derby week and there was no one in London to talk to. They did, however, manage to meet the governors of the British Film Institute: 'Our general impression of them was that they were well-meaning but rather vague, and some members of the board less than wholly disinterested.' In France, she met 'a M. Langlois, who has been given a little money to start a collection of French films.' She reported favourably on the Reichsfilmarchiv ('in our experience [it] has met the problem of preserving films more adequately than any other European country'). She was offered cooperation on everything except her request for a copy of *The Blue Angel*. 'This was refused on the grounds that it was a pornographic film, showing Germany and the Germans in a very unpleasant light and therefore they did not wish it to be shown again abroad.' The Abbotts rounded off their journey in the Soviet Union, including the almost obligatory meeting with Eisenstein.

It was significant that the Library was part of a museum, following its general acquisition policies and with an obligation to put its collection on display. But the cornerstone of the Library's policy was also the relationship it had established with the American film industry. In a 'Report on the Film Library' produced in 1956, Richard Griffith, Iris Barry's successor, noted that it had been almost too successful, 'overwhelmed' even in the mid-40s by so many donations (collections of films with Douglas Fairbanks, William S. Hart and others, as well as its acquisition in 1937 of D. W. Griffith's own negatives and feature prints) that it was continually looking for 'breathing space' to concentrate its attentions on preserving and caring for rather than merely assembling films. The Library no longer had the illusion that preservation was 'not only possible but easy': ample funds 'were or must be or should be' available for the work. Griffith also suggested that the MOMA Library was welcomed by Hollywood partly because it relieved the major companies of any pressure to do the job themselves, to make their own collections available for what was already becoming a serious educational demand. By 1956 there were 'almost seventy-five accredited film courses in more than fifty universities and colleges'.

Iris Barry had left MOMA in 1951, but remained active in archive affairs through FIAF. She retired to live in the South of France, and opened what

would appear to have been a not very successful antique shop. 'A dashing lady,' wrote Alistair Cooke in the *New York Times*, after her death in 1969, 'always long on mockery and short on tact' and one who 'always landed on her own or somebody else's feet'. She had 'done what she wanted and become a public servant'; a comment that would probably have held good for most of the pioneer archivists. She had, there was no doubt about it, style, as well as great influence on her contemporaries. In the 1950s, she came to London to give a lecture, and there is a notably sorrowful and apologetic letter to her in the Lindgren files: 'that slender little audience . . . never have I felt so disappointed and so powerless to do anything about it.'

The international archive network began to establish itself very early. When Iris Barry met 'a M. Langlois' in Paris in the summer of 1936, the Cinémathèque Française was not yet officially in existence; its statutes were signed on 2 September 1936. Later, Langlois' supporters liked to claim (may even have believed) that he had been the first of the archivists, inspiring everyone else, although Langlois himself acknowledged his debt to Iris Barry. In 1936 he was 21 years old; Georges Franju, the co-founder of the Cinémathèque, who was to become such a notable film-maker, was 23. They were two very young men, passionate film enthusiasts, whose first ambition had been to set up their own film club. A friend, the critic and film historian Jean Mitry, gave them a hand and they were able to start Le Cercle du Cinéma. Richard Roud in his biography of Langlois, *A Passion for Films*, says that it was their own idea to move beyond this to the creation of a film archive. Raymond Borde, in *Les Cinémathèques*, suggests that it may have been Mitry who steered them in this direction as well. In any event, Langlois' father had met the proprietor of the trade magazine *La Cinématographie Française*, who agreed to give them 10,000 francs (Roud) or 20,000 (Borde) to establish the collection, and who became first president of the Cinémathèque Française. Langlois' own role was, and remained, that of secretary-general. He, rather than the quieter and more self-effacing Franju, was the publicist and propagandist and spokesman.

Langlois' overriding and unchanging purpose was to show films; and to show, not necessarily to encourage research or discussion. In the early days he made it clear that he wanted no debates at his film club. His first programme, according to Roud, was a characteristic Langlois marathon: Epstein's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Paul Leni's *The Last Warning*. There was no time here for discussion, just as with Langlois there would never be time for cataloguing the collection, for developing thorough preservation policies. The film programme was the thing, and the attraction of setting up an archive was a combination of the collector's satisfaction in ownership of his treasures and the impresario's urge to find more material to screen. This was the way the Cinémathèque started and the way it would continue; and Langlois was his own master, as the other archivists, with their links to public institutions, could never be.

The fourth of the original archives, the National Film Library, was founded out of ambitions which were altogether less clear-cut, less personal and passionate. The British Film Institute had been set up in 1933, with a list of

objectives which included the creation of a 'repository of films of permanent value', and in 1935 this purpose was duly achieved. The BFI itself, however, owed its existence to a jumble of motives and a particular set of attitudes about the cinema which can perhaps best be described as 'very British'. Certainly the Institute which emerged, after a great deal of debate and shuffling negotiation, was a thoroughly British compromise, funded on a meagre though not inadequate scale with public money but operating as a private members' club. It is the discussion which accompanied the establishment of the BFI, and the attitudes it revealed, that makes its early history an intriguing episode in the record of Britain in the 1930s. If the other three archives could be defined in terms of their relationships with the state, with the film industry, and simply with film enthusiasts, the key relationship for the National Film Library was with the education profession.

TRADING WITH THE TRADE

The British Film Institute had its origins in a report, *The Film in National Life*, which was published in June 1932. This very thorough and influential piece of work represented the findings and conclusions of the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, which had been called together to look into 'the service which the cinematograph may render to education and social progress', and had been deliberating in a leisurely way for more than two years. The Commission, which was unofficial, had picked up a Carnegie Trust grant along the way to finance its operations. Organisations such as the British Institute of Adult Education had made most of the running in setting it up, and its membership was dominated by educationists, though with a small but significant sprinkling of civil servants. *The Film in National Life* was largely written by A.C. Cameron, Secretary of Education for the City of Oxford, and husband of the novelist Elizabeth Bowen. It strongly recommended the creation of some form of national film institute.

As usual in such matters, Britain was lagging behind. A number of countries, including France, Germany and Japan, had already equipped themselves with national organisations concerned with cinema. Even 'godless, Bolshevik Russia' had one, which persuaded the Archbishop of Canterbury that it was not an idea to be encouraged. But from the moment the report was published, it was more or less a foregone conclusion that Britain was about to gain a film institute. The journalist C.A. Lejeune warned the film trade to that effect: they might see the report as no more than 'pompous interference by amateurs', but they were going to have to live with its consequences.

Even the usual stumbling block, the problem of where the money was to come from, was sorted out before the BFI even came into existence. Cinemas were to be charged a special charity tax for screenings held on Sundays. John Buchan, novelist and MP, who was to be one of the early governors of the BFI, was also a director of British Instructional Pictures and so interested in the question of education and film. He came up with the ingenious notion that 5 per cent of the Cinematograph Fund should be used for financing the new institute. The Home Office decided to support the scheme, and modest funding for the BFI was therefore secured. The film trade were by no means pleased that money they saw as theirs was to be turned over to such a cause. The 'uplift tax', they mockingly called it. Before the BFI came into existence, in autumn 1933, with the purpose, among others, of trying to influence and improve public taste in films, the trade went to work.

defensive attitudes, so that the Archive seemed to see itself engaged in a holding operation from which it could not break out. Lindgren was 'simply putting the films away and hoping something might eventually happen,' in David Francis's words. By the 1970s new policies could at least be envisaged, but by that time Lindgren was too tired and too ill. Three years after his death in 1973, David Francis achieved the breakthrough, launching the plan to copy all the Archive's nitrate holdings by the year 2000. But this, of course, depended on the strength in depth of the organisation Lindgren had created. Twenty years after his death, there is no question that this is still his archive.

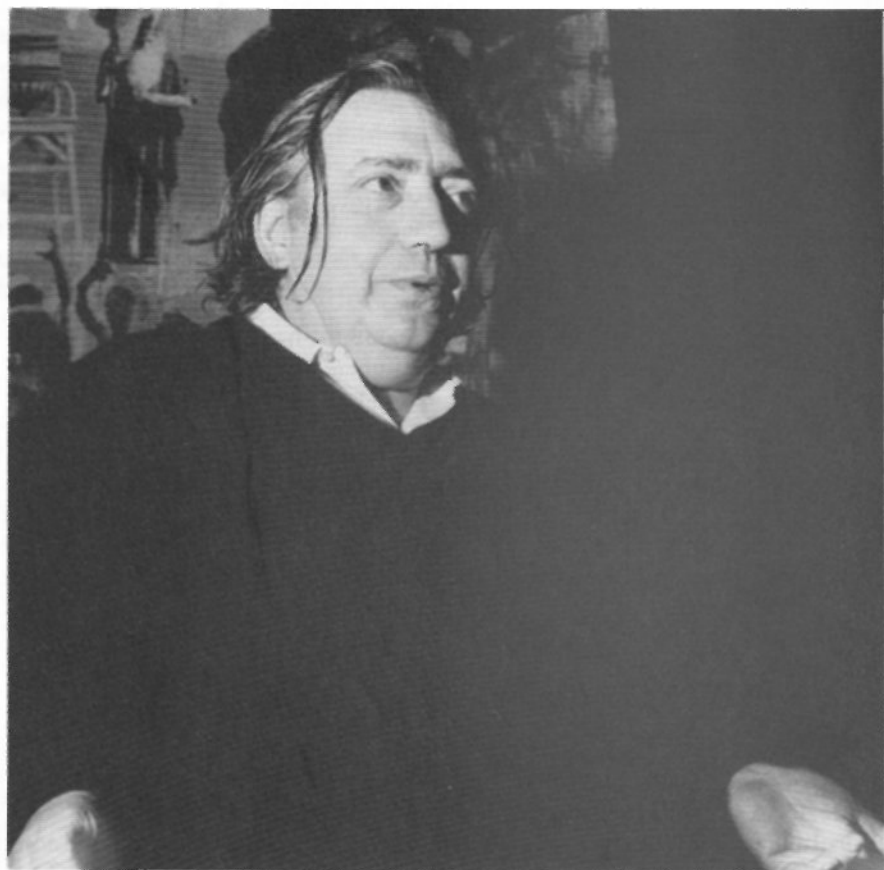
THERE IS ONLY ONE LANGLOIS

Ernest Lindgren was the tortoise; Henri Langlois the hare. At the end of the day the tortoise would have to be the winner, by right as well as by the rules that apply to fables. Since his death, Lindgren's reputation has soared among his fellow professionals, in some ways because they have caught up with his concerns and can see how often he asked the right questions. For much of his career, however, Langlois was out in front, the man who gave currency to the word *cinémathèque*, not just in France but throughout the world, who made the profession of archivist fashionable – not of course by preserving films but by showing them. He created a legend, gloried in it and before the end had become its prisoner.

First and always, Langlois was a collector – of posters, costumes, stills, documents, everything connected with films as well as films themselves. 'Undeniably the greatest *private* collector of films to date and probably of all time,' Lindgren said of him, though I have added the italics. He had a truffle-hound's instinct for sniffing films out: the most loyal subscribers to the legend were prepared to believe he could literally smell them. And like most collectors he chose to display his treasures on his own terms, would otherwise prefer secrecy about just what he had and where he kept it. Scribbled lists of films were to be preferred to more orthodox records; he was said not to be above such dodges as slipping films into wrongly labelled cans. An archive, he once said, was like a bank – a Swiss bank, of course – with an obligation to maintain confidentiality about its holdings in the interests of its depositors (whether of cash or of films).

For Lindgren, the serious work began when a film entered the archive: listing, cataloguing, testing, determining its state of health, all the detail of preservation. Langlois saw it as his task to rescue films, bringing them in off the streets or away from other hazardous places into the safe-keeping of his collection. What happened to them after that concerned him much less. Having no great personal interest in work which involved administration or dull detail, he found it easy to rationalise any neglect. Cataloguing was a lifetime operation; there was nothing urgent about it. Nitrate would eventually decay, but he thought it would last longer than other people reckoned. (In this, it would seem that time may be proving him right.) In any case, a collector planning for the long-term future of his archive would also need to believe in the long-term future of the planet, and Langlois may have been rather too much of a fatalist to have that kind of confidence.

If he had received the advice about the dangers of projecting prints which the



Henri Langlois

BKS gave the National Film Library, he would have been temperamentally incapable of taking it, even if he had been prepared to believe it. An archive which did not show its films was, for Langlois, simply an impossibility. Although not a man one would ever have thought of as whimsical or a sentimentalist, he could talk whimsically about films. They were like animals, pets, condemned to the dreariness of being locked away in the dark. Projection must be good for them, an outing, a treat. But in saying such things, of course, he might simply have been out to tease Lindgren and the orthodox. With Langlois, one could never be sure.

He was one of the relatively few archivists who consistently rejected any form of selection policy. (Others have included Freddy Buache of the Cinémathèque Suisse, a veteran Langlois ally, and Raymond Borge of the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, an opponent of Langlois on most other points.) Choice, Langlois argued, could become a form of censorship. He was also well aware that the one sure thing about taste is that it changes, that any archive basing its policy on the safe critical judgments of the day could well look very foolish to succeeding generations. He took whatever he could get and, having taken the material in,

dumped it in whatever storage was available to him. In the 1950s, after the regulations about handling nitrate were imposed in France, the film companies unloaded vast quantities of their unwanted stocks on to the Cinémathèque. Some of this, Richard Roud suggested in *A Passion for Films*, might very well have been in a state of decay from the moment it arrived. With so much footage coming in, and no proper system of checking it, only luck would really let Langlois know the condition of his hoard.

As a collector, Langlois preferred to deal with film-makers themselves. Lindgren's ^{from} letters and Iris Barry's high-level negotiations kept dealings on an official level; Langlois chose more personal relationships where he could. He felt that the greatest asset for the Cinémathèque was the fact that film-makers trusted it – much more than they did any archive with state connections. And he believed it was essential for an archive to maintain a high profile, to be known and seen and to pursue as many public activities as possible. This was one reason for his fondness for staging exhibitions, and the care he put into them. Even a show put on in a hotel ballroom at Cannes, for a few days during the festival, would have all his trademarks of lightness, wit, cleverness and fun. And above all, of course, he put on films.

The theatres Langlois had at his disposal were not large. The one at the Cinémathèque's Avenue de Messine headquarters, from about the end of the war to the mid-50s, was virtually a screening room, with a bare fifty seats. François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jean-Luc Godard and the rest of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* team went there, and the atmosphere of a tiny club heightened the sense of excitement. This was also the immediate postwar period: a generation which had been cut off from large areas of world cinema during the war, and a new generation discovering film, were able to meet there – as they did in London at about the same time at screenings put on by the New London Film Society. In the mid-1950s, the Cinémathèque moved to a new address and gained access to a 250-seat cinema. But it was not until 1963, with the transfer to the Palais de Chaillot and greatly increased government support, that Langlois really had the space to spread himself. For many years the Cinémathèque screenings owed their influence to the concentration and quality of the audience, drawn by Langlois' dazzling programming, rather than to numbers.

In a sense, however, the first turning point for the Cinémathèque had come earlier, during the war. According to Georges Franju, quoted in *A Passion for Films*, the collection at the time the Germans marched into Paris was tiny, a mere 300 films. When the Germans left, it was nearer 3,000. This staggering increase was largely the result of the presence in Paris of Frank Hensel, head of the Reichsfilmarchiv, first president of FIAF, and now a major with the German army of occupation. Hensel apparently tipped off Langlois and Franju when films were about to be confiscated or companies were being closed down, helping them with both acquisitions and the space to store them. In a shady period, the unanswered question would have to be Hensel's motive. Was he merely acting in the spirit of FIAF, helping out a fellow archive, though doing so in improbable

circumstances and going to improbable lengths? Was he, as Raymond Borde tentatively suggested in *Les Cinémathèques*, laying some of the foundations for a massive Euroarchive under Nazi control? Was he, as has also been suggested, using his FIAF post to dodge more active military service? Was he a good archivist, a good German, a good bureaucrat? For Langlois and Franju, of course, there was only one motive: to build up the collection, accepting the means.

At the same time, Langlois was sending films away from Paris, setting up caches in the houses of friends to keep his treasures safe from the Germans. (Some romantics like to believe that films may still emerge from long-forgotten hiding places, lost masterpieces which have been mouldering like so many sleeping beauties in distant châteaux.) He was also organising screenings, wherever and whenever he could. Simone Signoret claimed that her first sight of *Battleship Potemkin* was in his mother's kitchen. Not possible, said Mary Meerson, Langlois' closest collaborator, in a mood to spoil a good story: the Cinémathèque never had a 16mm print of *Potemkin*. Lotte Eisner, who had left Nazi Germany in the early 1930s and found her way to the Cinémathèque, was meanwhile dodging the Germans by passing herself off as cook at a girls' school (appropriately, under her *nom de guerre* of Escoffier). Lotte Eisner, authority on German cinema, biographer of Lang and Murnau, was also, one might say, the charming face of the Cinémathèque, Langlois' most trusted emissary on overseas errands. She was to assemble for him many of the trophies he eventually put on show at the Musée du Cinéma.

After the war, the Cinémathèque was immediately back in its stride, as was FIAF, which held its first postwar meeting in Paris in 1946. Langlois' influence over the international archive movement, already established, lasted until 1959, by which time he was also a power in a wider world. He could be extremely supportive to other archives, helping both Freddy Buache in Switzerland and Jacques Ledoux in Brussels. He had overwhelming strength of personality. And above all he had the films. From the first postwar days the archives engaged in a brisk international traffic, exchanging and lending prints. As a source of supply, the Cinémathèque Française was unmatched, and Langlois lent generously, always willing to help a cause he approved. The other archives needed his films; so did the film theatres. 'Without Langlois,' Richard Roud wrote in the *Guardian* in 1968, 'London would never have had the chance of seeing Feuillade's *Les Vampires*, Buñuel's *L'Âge d'Or*, the new longer version of Stroheim's *Queen Kelly*, the complete sound-scored print of Stroheim's *The Wedding March*, many of the films of Jean Renoir, the complete print of Ophüls' *Lola Montès*, the Abel Gance retrospective.' Roud and his colleagues at the National Film Theatre received little such support from the National Film Archive.

Some archives, Langlois thought, were not at all to be trusted with prints. There was a fearful row in the early 1950s when he became convinced, rightly or wrongly, that a print of *L'Âge d'Or* which had turned up in the Middle East must have originated in a copy which he had lent the BFI. Although not in some matters a man of fine scruple, Langlois prided himself on justifying the trust of the people who gave him films, the depositors in his bank. Clandestine copying



Louis Feuillade's *Les Vampires*, one of the classics Langlois rescued from obscurity.

infuriated him, and he was always suspicious that it might be going on, reluctant even to use the orthodox film transport services, as though privateers and predators might be lurking in mid-Channel. Films on loan were usually delivered by hand, with Lotte Eisner serving as messenger. She would arrive in the small *Sight and Sound* office, having travelled from France by the night ferry train, shake hands several times with everyone in sight, including stray visitors and bemused temporary typists, and settle down to a conversation which never greatly changed over the years. 'Oh, my dears, I should not be here. My publishers need me in Paris, I have my proofs to finish. But Henri insisted, so I came. . . ' Henri always insisted; Lotte usually came.

On one occasion, Langlois came himself. He walked into the office, dropped his bag on a chair and began talking. His conversation, as François Truffaut described it in his preface to *A Passion for Films*, was 'a monologue revolving around a conspiracy'. He had always just seen off an enemy, attended some fateful meeting, was about to discover a lost glory of cinema. In an office much too small for him, he knocked his bag to the floor during one of his grander gestures, and out of it cascaded not a shower but a flood of small change—dimes, pennies, centimes, pesetas, cents, lire. We scuffled at his feet, picking up his haul, while he talked on, imperturbable and unembarrassed. There was to be no explanation of how he came to be carrying such a dead weight of tiny coins around with him; but this whole encounter, at once largely absurd and slightly mysterious, was characteristic of meetings with Langlois.

He lived, notoriously, in a world of plots and intrigues. He consulted astrologers and feared the worst. A note in the BFI files records a visit paid him in 1952 by Denis Forman, then director of the BFI. Langlois had been under pressure to



After the fire. Devastation at the Cinémathèque Française in the summer of 1959.

release films to French television, and was worried about the consequences of refusing. He and Mary Meerson were busily packing up some films, with the idea of shipping them out to safety in Brussels. 'I didn't know whether to laugh or cry,' wrote Forman. 'While we [at the BFI] are grappling with the real world, they live in a world which they have invented for themselves.' All the same, he added, 'Langlois' stubborn idealism has hauled FIAF at least out of the shadows of his mind into the cold outer climate where contracts are kept and money is actually paid.'

In 1959 the Cinémathèque was hit by a brutal blow, which was to have considerable repercussions. On a hot day, films had been left stacked up in an open courtyard outside its headquarters in the Rue de Courcelles. This was what many people regard as the classic situation for setting off a nitrate fire, and the films duly and disastrously burnt: the only fire, or the only one of any consequence, it was said, during Langlois' long career at the Cinémathèque. He was devastated and furious. The humiliation was the more cruel in that many of the films destroyed in the fire were awaiting transport and were the property of other archives. They had lost some irreplaceable material, but the shortcomings of the Cinémathèque's system of record-keeping, such as it was, meant that no one could exactly estimate the casualties.

It was probably not coincidental that Langlois' extraordinary decision to leave FIAF, which he had done more than anyone to create and nurture, came shortly after the fire. He had promised to bring a list of the lost films to the 1959 FIAF congress; his failure to do so, some observers thought, triggered off the chain of events which ended in his departure. The significance of the whole episode belongs to the story of FIAF, but it also had the effect of drastically worsening the

already uneasy relations between Lindgren and Langlois and of damaging Langlois' credibility with his fellow archivists.

In the 1960s France had no national film archive, but the most celebrated institution of its kind in the world. This was a situation to be righted, by a government for which French prestige was bound up with the glory of its arts organisations. Langlois was supported in the move to the splendours and space of the Palais de Chaillot and given considerably more in the way of public subsidy. With the increase in funds, however, came the inevitable demand for greater accountability. The Cinémathèque was still a private concern, run by a council but ruled by its imperious secretary-general; the opportunity was there for expansion.

Langlois, however, was precisely the wrong man to be placed in such a situation. His secretive methods of operation were too engrained; he could not work easily with the administrator put in by the authorities; he suspected that the imaginary plots against him – if indeed they had been imaginary – had finally become real, and he prepared his defences accordingly. In February 1968 the council of the Cinémathèque Française, acting on the instructions of the Arts Minister, André Malraux, dismissed Langlois from his post. Pierre Barbin, who had previously directed small festivals at Tours and Annecy, was brought in to replace him. There were, of course, two views of how matters had been allowed to reach this extraordinary pass. That the government had been extremely patient and forbearing with an increasingly unworkable situation; or that the civil servants, the tidy-minded, the people who grumbled that Langlois spent too much on entertaining film stars who might give him films, and who even queried his taxi fares, had finally caught up with someone they had always seen as difficult and unmanageable. Was he still the one essential man with whom the official guardians of culture would have to live, or had he become a luxury they no longer wanted?

The Ministry must have nerved itself to its decision: it can never have been expected that Langlois would go quietly. No one, however, could have forecast the passions in the battle for the Cinémathèque, or the extent of the debts and loyalties Langlois was able to call on. The French film-makers were already mistrustful of the government, after attempts to impose a stricter, more puritanical Gaullist censorship and the banning of Jacques Rivette's *La Religieuse* (1965). Virtually every film-maker in France, from Jean Renoir to the New Wave generation who had learned their craft in the front rows at the Cinémathèque, lined up behind Langlois. Truffaut and Godard scuffled with police as they led street protests, which were joined, as Truffaut put it in Roud's *A Passion for Films*, by 'unknown faces, those of Maoist and anarchist students, some of whom were shortly to become famous'. (They included Daniel Cohn Bendit, 'Danny the Red' to the headline writers.) The Left, involving itself in a cause where the target was a soft one and the government was busy digging its own grave, turned the Cinémathèque affair into a dress rehearsal for May 1968 – when they again showed their taste for film occasions by halting the Cannes Festival.

Langlois had persuaded film-makers that their tenuous grip on immortality would be a little more secure if they gave their films to the Cinémathèque. Now

the trust he had boasted of was seen to be real. Letters in support of him poured in: from Charles Chaplin, Orson Welles, Fritz Lang, Ingmar Bergman, Roberto Rossellini, Joseph Losey, Nicholas Ray. The momentum of a protest everyone wanted to join became unstoppable, with many directors making it clear that they regarded the films they had deposited in the Cinémathèque as personal gifts to Langlois, and would not hesitate to withdraw them if he was no longer there. According to Richard Roud, the last straw for the beleaguered Ministry came with the intervention of Frederick Gronich, official representative in Paris of the American producers. The major companies, the big battalions of Hollywood, were prepared to join the campaign, with some big sticks to wave. Apart from genuine admiration for Langlois, they had always much preferred dealing with individuals, and their suspicions of a potential state archive came into play.

In a situation rich in irony, the saddest touch was that André Malraux, France's most cultivated Arts minister and himself an occasional film-maker (Langlois was even credited with saving his film *Espoir*), should have dealt the blow. It was a remarkable achievement, wrote one of the French commentators, for an Arts minister to destroy a kind of museum. 'There is no shortage in France of good accountants and good administrators,' wrote Jean de Baroncelli in *Le Monde*, 'but there is only one Henri Langlois.' Malraux must have felt that he had been badly let down by his civil servants in underestimating the overwhelming public support; and Langlois himself behaved with great shrewdness, no doubt mustering his allies in private but in public saying nothing at all, aware that he could trust his friends to put his case more effectively than he could himself. The luckless Pierre Barbin disappeared from the scene. In April 1968, Langlois was reinstated, but government funding for the Cinémathèque was considerably reduced. The government had retreated, with as much grace as it could muster; any plans to establish the Cinémathèque Française as the French national archive had been abandoned. Vaults at Bois d'Arcy, near Versailles, had already been occupied by the Cinémathèque; they were to become the base for a national archive administered by the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), but it was to take a very long time to recover the confidence lost in 1968.

Later that year, Iris Barry wrote to Lindgren: 'Langlois came to see me. He was very amusing, if garrulous, and really quite potty. He said that it was he who stopped the Cannes Festival and caused the students' "revolution".' Lindgren himself had been greatly incensed by all the enthusiasm for Langlois in the British press. Plaintively, he asked why everyone wrote about the Cinémathèque. Couldn't some words be spared for his own archive? And he was justifiably hurt by the implied sneer when one journalist did mention the NFA, but only to contrast what was seen as the glorious shambles of Langlois' untidy paradise with the staid and boring order that prevailed in London.

Lindgren's papers in the BFI contain the draft of a letter written at the time to the *Listener*. During the late 1960s, he pointed out, the Cinémathèque had been receiving 'more than twice as much' as the NFA in government grants. (In fact, Malraux said at the time, the Cinémathèque had been given 20 million francs over a ten-year period.) The collection amounted, Lindgren said, to about 7,000

reels of film in excellent condition – those that were in more or less regular use for screenings. There were reckoned to be some 200,000 reels in storage elsewhere, acetate and nitrate indiscriminately jumbled together, of which only some 20 per cent was believed to be in good shape. 'If more detailed examination confirms this analysis, the Cinémathèque under Langlois will not have been a saviour of the cinema's heritage . . . but one of its most massive destroyers.'

Wisely, in the circumstances, it seems that Lindgren did not send the letter. The weakness, in any case, of this damning charge was that if Langlois had not rescued the films in the first place many of them would probably have been destroyed anyhow, rather than left to take their chance in his indifferent storage conditions. During the 1968 rumpus, a group of French journalists was taken on an official tour of the Bois d'Arcy vaults, with the expectation that they would be shocked at the piles of rusty cans. But, said Langlois' supporters, he had been complaining to the government for years about damp and inadequate storage. There were two sides to most of the stories, and in 1968 Langlois' side was the only one most people wanted to hear.

After 1968, the Cinémathèque was in financial trouble – so serious at one point that Mary Meerson had to appeal to film-makers for help in paying the wage bill. Langlois, however, went ahead with his plans for the Musée du Cinéma, which opened in 1972 at the Palais de Chaillot. It was, he said, to be his permanent memorial. And it was a splendid expression of his feelings about cinema, not its chronological history but its spirit, expressed through all those witty, ingenious and enlivening associations of objects which characterised any exhibition he put on. The sense of his enthusiasm was everywhere. He had wanted a museum for years; now he had one, even if the regular operations of the Cinémathèque were left to pay the price.

I made a flying visit to Paris to report on the Museum for a magazine, and was told by Mary Meerson that Langlois intended to take me round it himself – not entirely welcome news. Mary Meerson sat near the door, knowing everything and watching everything, like those elderly women in black who dominate old-fashioned French restaurants as they crouch over the accounts. Langlois was in vigorous form, and I soon saw why. The Museum had no catalogue and no labels identifying the exhibits. The labels would come next day or next week, he said, but one knew that if he had his way they would never come. (I believe they never did.) He didn't want visitors being distracted by reading labels, or the sort of visitors who would bother to read them. More than that, as I soon realised from various sidelong looks and significant pauses, the tour was one of those tests he so enjoyed.

I hoped that I was not too shamefully displaying English ignorance, when we reached an exhibit which in a chronologically organised show would have been much nearer the beginning. It consisted of a little model ranch house, in a very French style, a toy camera and a strip of artificial grass on which were scattered some rather grubby and twisted pieces of string. It was a fair guess that this had once represented Eadweard Muybridge's famous pre-cinema experiment, when he won a bet for Governor Stanford of California by demonstrating that at one

point in a horse's action all four feet are off the ground at the same time. 'Oh, yes,' I said. 'Muybridge. But where's your horse?'

Langlois was extremely put out. He was obviously annoyed that his Museum had been vandalised in its first few days, even more so that this had been spotted by a visitor, and one who might be expected to report any deficiencies to the unloved British Film Institute. Shortly afterwards, he decided that he had some urgent work to attend to, and I was left to explore the rest of the show unaccompanied. Such uneasy encounters left one feeling that one was playing a minor role in a Langlois fantasy, if only as the agent from England.

Langlois spent much of the 1970s travelling backwards and forwards to America. In 1974, the American film industry signalled its high regard by awarding him an Oscar, a remarkable tribute. American admirers had also persuaded him that it might be possible to open a Cinémathèque in New York, and he spent a good deal of time looking at sites and talking about finance. Nothing came of the scheme, and inevitably the affairs of the Cinémathèque were neglected, even though he also saw the American excursions as attempts to raise money. François Truffaut, who had done more than anyone in 1968 to fight Langlois' battles, quietly left the council of the Cinémathèque. He saw the Museum as too much of an extravagance; it would have been better to spend the money on copying some of the nitrate films in the collection. Worries about the conditions in which films were being kept increased during the 1970s. Langlois' reputation was already slipping when he collapsed and died suddenly, on 12 January 1977, after a long session doing what he had always most enjoyed: programming for the Cinémathèque. He was a Falstaffian figure, outsize in both his virtues and his failings.

The legend has been fading since his death, now that the sheer impact of his personality has lost its power and a younger generation of archivists has been made aware of the damage he did by failing to protect the collection. A serious fire in 1980, three years after his death, at one of his Paris storehouses dealt another blow to his reputation: as with the 1959 fire, the full extent of the loss remained unknown – as did the scale of the collection. It was always assumed that Langlois claimed a good many more titles than he actually had. French archivists, left with an inheritance of such confusion, have only in the 1990s really come to grips with all the problems it presents. Michelle Aubert, head of the CNC archives at Bois d'Arcy, spoke of 'twenty-five wasted years', of the delay in launching a major programme for the copying of the French nitrate holdings and in achieving the kind of centralisation and secure funding that Langlois threw away in 1968, when he defended his own concept of the Cinémathèque against the chance that it might become a national institution. And this was not merely wilful: he had strong views about the morality of film archives, the need to preserve the original vision. France also was left largely outside major international developments, being represented for years at FIAF only by Raymond Borde's Cinémathèque de Toulouse.

As between Lindgren and Langlois, perhaps the fairest summing up would be that without Lindgren we might not have the confident international archive

movement of today, and that without Langlois we might not have had the excitement and tensions and enthusiasms that initially propelled the movement forward. 'We are all children of Langlois,' said his old adversary Jacques Ledoux, 'even if we have rejected our father.' But Ledoux added that Langlois himself was 'the child of Iris Barry'.

INTERNATIONAL

Television is essentially a medium for a nation talking to and about itself, and no amount of imported programming really changes that. Cinema, from the beginning, functioned internationally. There were no language barriers, and by the time sound arrived to impose them habits were too firmly entrenched to be broken. This way of thinking internationally may be one reason that the first four film archives decided so very quickly to form their federation. They knew that they would need cooperation and exchange, and also that there could be safety in alliances. They were very much on their own. The museum and library worlds, with which they could have had affinities, would still have found film too noisy, vulgar and commercial. And as they tried to work out their rules and procedures, they had to develop relationships with the most opportunist and cut-throat of the great industries, one with no tradition of social responsibility, no habit of spending money on such things as research and development, and no love for any form of interference in its affairs by government or outside agencies. The archives could not afford to make any false moves. Among other factors, they may have felt the need to police each other.

The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) was founded at a meeting in Paris on 17 June 1938. Those involved were John Abbott and Iris Barry, Frank Hensel of the Reichsfilmarchiv, Henri Langlois and Olwen Vaughan, the genial enthusiast who was then secretary of the British Film Institute and who used improbably to boast of keeping the BFI's books in pencil 'because they were always changing their minds and it was easiest to rub out'. Both Iris Barry and Olwen Vaughan would appear to have had some reservations about dealing with the Nazi archive, but Langlois and Franju enthusiastically enrolled Hensel. It was the French Right which was anti-German, Franju told Richard Roud. 'The Popular Front was all for peace.' Written into the first statutes of FIAF was one clear rule: 'Rigorously excluded from the Federation are all institutions or organisations whatsoever which use their films for a commercial purpose.'

A year later the little group got together again for their second Congress. Members of FIAF have always been enthusiastic travellers, and they certainly started as they would go on; although three of the four archives were based in Europe, their meeting took place in New York. Officers were duly elected: President (Hensel), Chairman (Abbott), Secretary-General (Langlois), Treasurer (Vaughan). With that curious innocence of the real world which so often

characterises novice international organisations, they planned to hold a third meeting in summer 1940, in Berlin.

The Royal Belgian Film Archive was founded in 1938, just too late for these first FIAF meetings. At the outbreak of war, according to Raymond Borde, its collection in any case consisted of precisely three films – one of them *Battleship Potemkin*. Archives were founded during the war in Switzerland and in Denmark, both at first small, private, independent creations; and in 1946 FIAF itself promptly took up again where it had left off. Paris, already established as its administrative headquarters, was the venue for the 1946 Congress.

In November 1947 Langlois wrote to Lindgren: 'I am absolutely convinced that the individual development of each cinémathèque can be effective only in relation to the development of cinémathèques throughout the world. Without international cooperation and an international understanding of the problems, we will not be able to make progress, or to overcome the inevitable crises.' It would appear that the immediate cause of this letter was a statement by the then director of the BFI, Oliver Bell, in which it seemed that he was taking an independent line on dealings with film societies. The societies, more powerful in Europe than in Britain, wanted films for their screenings; this was another area in which the archives had to tread warily. Langlois' view, which became FIAF's view, was that it would be too easy for any archive stepping out of line to cause trouble for fellow members: FIAF must work to a common set of rules and principles. Although this made sound sense, it was also striking that almost from the outset FIAF was thinking defensively.

The Federation was rapidly acquiring members. By 1948 its executive committee,

Jerzy Toeplitz and Mrs Kawakita



now minus Hensel and with Lindgren firmly established in place of Olwen Vaughan, had been expanded to include representatives from Milan, Copenhagen, São Paulo and, most notably, Warsaw. Jerzy Toeplitz, head of the Warsaw archive, was to be president of FIAF in an unbroken run from 1948 to 1971. Astute, diplomatic and cautious, he helped to ensure that lines of communication stayed open throughout the Cold War. FIAF, someone said to me, was always split between the film enthusiasts and the administrators, never between East and West. The archivists' brand of internationalism was the real thing; many of their congresses in the 1950s and 60s were held in Eastern Europe, to ensure that there would be no attendance problems because of travel restrictions. Although São Paulo was an early member, represented by P.E. Sales Gomes, the biographer of Jean Vigo, FIAF was strongly centred in Europe, with new members coming roughly equally from East and West. Iris Barry, as founder-president, kept a slightly distant eye on things. Toeplitz, in a period before fax machines and reliable international telephone systems, cannot have had much involvement in day-to-day business. Langlois as secretary-general, with FIAF's headquarters in the Cinémathèque's own building, had every opportunity to keep the organisation running as he wanted it.

FIAF had very little money, and some French financial support was obviously invaluable. Its source of income has always been the subscriptions paid by its members, and although these were kept as low as possible, to encourage new recruits, several archives had the utmost difficulty in paying their dues. Throughout FIAF's existence, the files record efforts to hold on to defaulting members, by deferred payments and other stratagems. Sometimes, however reluctantly, archives had to be cast out. Although São Paulo was one of the first postwar members, in 1963 FIAF was sadly recording that its Latin American section was temporarily no more; in spite of all the help offered, Brazil had followed Uruguay in failing to pay. Currency export problems were apparently partly to blame, and it would seem that both archives were able to linger on. Now many people, among them Mary Lea Bandy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Department, feel that Latin America has become the great area for archive growth in the 1990s. It took a long time, however, for FIAF to build up even its North American membership. In the 1950s, when Langlois could count on being re-elected each year as secretary-general, the Federation was dominated by European archives and European ideas.

Throughout this period FIAF was exploring ways to work effectively. There was exchange and barter of films between archives: the NFA always seemed to be shipping off prints of Hitchcock's *Blackmail*, then its trump card in the exchange business. Richer archives set up a pool of spare prints to help out poorer ones, although Lindgren thought that the smaller archives, with little of their own worth exchanging, were inclined to use the service merely as a lending library. He was also scathing about a 'stamp collector mentality', arguing that too many archives were swapping prints in poor condition, building up collections of indifferent material rather than making the effort of going for the best available. Most archives, however, were 'so young and undeveloped and

inadequately financed that my proposals must have seemed beyond their immediate reach.'

The more ambitious plans for international cooperation mainly fell apart, for lack of resources or of will. There was a good deal of talk, but never much more than talk, about setting up an international bureau of film historical research. There were plans for each archive to concentrate its attentions on some particular area of cinema. In one such venture, the Cinémathèque Suisse volunteered to build up an international library of film books at its Lausanne headquarters, the notion being that other archives would feed it with spare copies. In 1955 they reported, rather forlornly, that no books had been received – even willing donors had no copies to send. It was, as Toeplitz was later to describe it, the archives' era of improvisation; and of impoverishment.

In 1959 Henri Langlois walked out of the FIAF annual congress, which that year took place in Stockholm. Elderly archivists still recall the occasion, as though they had been present at some kind of unprecedented natural disaster. Although Lindgren cannot be regarded as an unbiased witness where Langlois was concerned, his account of the whole perplexing series of events is lucid, plausible, and agrees with others on all points that can be checked.

Langlois arrived in Stockholm in a mood to make trouble, knowing that he would be expected to account for the losses from the fire at Rue de Courcelles. It was partly to distract attention from this potential embarrassment, Lindgren suggested, that he launched an attack on Jacques Ledoux, the Belgian archivist, for breaking the FIAF rule that archive should speak only unto archive. This regulation, designed to stop archives poaching on each other's preserves, meant that in any dealings with, for instance, American distributors in Paris, Ledoux should have used Langlois as an intermediary. Not all archivists, it would seem, are absolutely scrupulous about keeping to all rules. But Ledoux, who had not intended to attend the Stockholm meeting, took the accusation seriously enough to rush there to defend himself. Langlois had left his evidence behind in Paris. The matter, it was agreed, must be shelved. And it was in this already acrimonious atmosphere that FIAF proceeded to its annual elections. Langlois was confirmed, as usual, as secretary-general. He waited until Ledoux was voted on to the executive committee, muttered that he couldn't possibly work with 'such a person', gathered his papers together in the most effectively theatrical way and stalked out. He never went back.

His motives were never entirely clear. Was it an angry gesture from which he later found it impossible to back down? Was his distrust of Jacques Ledoux so great? Did he feel that FIAF was no longer the original association of a few like-minded enthusiasts but an organisation he found increasingly unsympathetic, gathering round itself the usual paraphernalia of international bureaucracy? Did he think he could divide it and still conquer it? A book published in 1992, with material not available to Langlois' biographers, does not answer the questions, but it does provide revealing insights into the always devious workings of his mind.

Le Dragon et l'Alouette is a collection of letters, the record of a correspondence

lasting thirty years between Langlois and Maria Adriana Prolo, founder of the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin. Meticulously edited and annotated by Sergio Toffetti, the book is a fascinating piece of film history in its own right, the record of a friendship between two people obsessed with their work and their battles with the bureaucrats and the administrators. Maria Adriana Prolo was one of those impossibly tenacious people who in the end, at whatever cost to themselves and probably to most of those around them, manage to achieve something at least of their dreams. She set out in 1941, without aid or encouragement, to launch a film museum. By 1948, when she was well on the way in her perennial struggle to find funds and secure premises, she had encountered Langlois. He described her disparagingly in a letter: 'A little provincial who knows what she wants. And what she wants is a position, a Museum, the approval of Turin...' But he took her up, confided in her, chivvied, patronised, bullied, encouraged and supported her for the next thirty years.

Prolo, evidently a charming woman but in her letters a distinctly woebegone one, needed a good deal of encouragement. In 1955: 'The absurdity of the work that we do, in giving our whole life, our means, our best years, happiness, even health, for a chimera... I am in the depths of despair.' In 1958: 'If it were not for *l'esprit* FIAF I would give it all up.' In the same year, to Lotte Eisner: 'Dear Lotte, I have chosen my prison.' One can appreciate the value of FIAF's brand of comradeship to someone who felt so isolated in her own work, at a time when launching a film museum had to be an act of blind determination. But Prolo was a battler, if often a despondent one, and the kind of ally Langlois appreciated.

The impression given by Langlois' post-1959 letters is not so much that he had left FIAF, however it may have looked to other people, but that he thought FIAF had left him – and that he could get it back. Some old associates followed him out: Freddy Buache of the Cinémathèque Suisse; James Card, of Eastman House in Rochester, New York; Mrs Kawakita, of the Japan Film Library; and of course the trusty Maria Adriana Prolo herself. In January 1960 Langlois assured her that there were now two FIAs – the 'legal one', his one, based as always at the Cinémathèque, and the 'other one'. In February 1960 he was 'worried about FIAF', and considered opening records which would reveal infringements of its statutes and of copyright. 'But there are things a gentleman [in English] doesn't do.' In January 1962 the fight still dragged on. 'FIAF is dead,' he wrote to Prolo. Soon its 'decomposition' would become evident.

The events that followed his departure became increasingly comical, though FIAF could hardly be blamed for failing to see a funny side to them. The comfortable arrangements whereby FIAF's quarters were in the Cinémathèque building became a good deal less comfortable. When FIAF suspected that its mail was being delayed and tampered with, it was agreed that the solution likely to cause the least fuss was to operate from a post-office box address. (If there was interference with the mail, it was probably not Langlois' own doing; it certainly was not his style.) Marion Michelle, executive secretary of FIAF and the particular *bête noire* of Langlois and Prolo, who spitefully nicknamed her 'Madame Mirliflore' and saw her as machinator in chief, was duly instructed to

set up the new postal arrangements. She found this impossible: FIAF, it turned out, had never been registered by Langlois with the French authorities, and had existed happily in France for many years without knowing that it had no legal status there.

The Federation moved out of the Cinémathèque building to another address in Paris, a departure which was too pragmatic for Langlois, bewildering him almost as much as it infuriated him. His argument, throughout these squabbles, was a peculiarly legalistic one. By FIAF's own rules, all its activities in France had to be conducted through the Cinémathèque, as its representative. Therefore any action which did not directly involve the Cinémathèque had to be invalid. This, he thought, would in the long run secure his own position. Meanwhile he would keep them guessing. 'Silence, silence in the present situation is the greatest strength,' he wrote to Prolo in July 1960. 'Are we in FIAF or are we outside it? Nobody knows. Am I or am I not a member of the executive committee? Nobody knows.' He even reappeared abruptly and briefly in his secretary-general role, apparently for the sole purpose of sacking Marion Michelle – which, it turned out, he did not have the authority to do.

In all these protracted manoeuvres, FIAF showed extreme patience, reluctant to take the final step of replacing Langlois. Eventually, he brought matters rather absurdly to a head. He retaliated against FIAF's move from the Cinémathèque by obtaining a sequestration order, ensuring that the Federation's possessions, including its papers and records, remained locked away out of reach in its former office. And he registered a French organisation with objectives virtually identical to those of FIAF, though with no members except himself and one or two of the Cinémathèque staff. This had the effect of so bemusing the authorities that FIAF was unable to regularise its own position in France. These were wrecker tactics, Langlois at his most mischievously inventive, and an expression of the intense dislike he felt for former colleagues, now seen as malevolent intriguers. Jerzy Toeplitz, Ernest Lindgren and Marion Michelle were the hated trio. 'It's marvellous,' he wrote to Prolo, 'to feel free of these vampires.'

Thick files in both Brussels and London record the rather dreary progress of the legal action which FIAF felt constrained to bring, against Langlois personally. It dragged on for several years, eventually being settled in a rather half-hearted way out of court, though it was not until 1978 that FIAF managed to catch up with its incarcerated property. And in 1964, despite determined and optimistic efforts to stay in France, FIAF was forced to pack its bags. French law required that any resident international organisation should have a French representative. There was some notion that FIAF might move to London, but this, it was thought, would look too much like Lindgren's revenge, 'a continuation of the Hundred Years War'. The Federation found its new home in Brussels. Jacques Ledoux was already established as secretary-general, a small, brisk, short-sighted man, the owl replacing the dragon. Order, of a kind, returned.

For Lindgren, the issue had essentially been whether FIAF should function as a democratic organisation or allow Langlois to dictate and dominate. If Langlois split the Federation, he was prepared to leave it. To Iris Barry, it seemed that

Langlois had worked himself into an impossible position: 'The reasonable course would have been to withdraw the [original] charge, but this his *amour propre* and his personal hostility to Ledoux refuse to allow him to do.' 'I gather that the Langlois lawsuit drags on,' she wrote later to Lindgren in an undated letter, 'and that he is up to no good as usual. What a bore and what a pity that we didn't have a showdown with him long ago.'

The whole affair, undoubtedly, rocked FIAF to its foundations. Langlois reckoned that it could not possibly do without him, and in some ways he was right. The Cinémathèque was a major source of film supply for other archives. In 1962, FIAF reluctantly but inevitably decided to suspend it from membership, as a prelude to expulsion: 'It is no longer possible for FIAF to tolerate within its membership an archive which for two and a half years has done everything possible to bring harm to the Federation and its members.' There were to be no more dealings over films, an embargo which had to be costly and which might prove unworkable.

FIAF, however, proved more grown up and resilient than Langlois had expected: in effect, it had become an organisation, rather than a collection of individuals. In 1960 the membership gave the committee overwhelming support for their handling of the affair, and under pressure the Federation continued to hold together. Gradually, Langlois' allies went back, in Maria Adriana Prolo's case sadly and shamefacedly. In the early 1970s she tried to persuade FIAF to invite Langlois to rejoin. But would he want it, asked Ledoux. In fact, the Cinémathèque Française returned to FIAF as an observer (something less than a full member) in 1982, after the film-maker Costa-Gavras had been appointed as its president. It was only reinstated as a member in 1991.

The ban on dealings with the Cinémathèque lasted only a couple of years or so. Before it came into force, but at the height of the rumpus, a letter from Langlois to James Quinn, director of the BFI, is a particularly fine example of his delicate mischief-making. Langlois needed films from the NEA for a Hitchcock season he was putting on in Paris, and thought that Lindgren was showing no alacrity in shipping them across the Channel. This was quite possible, though Lindgren's defence, that Langlois had never bothered to tell him when the films would be needed, was just as plausible. It would be embarrassing, Langlois wrote to Quinn, if the British ambassador, or the ambassador's wife, or other senior staff from the embassy, turned up for a film and had to be told that it was not on the screen because it had not yet left London. This, however, would be a matter for the British among themselves. He was not going to enjoy having to give the same answer to M. Hitchcock... Only Langlois could have devised a threat based on the entirely improbable notion that the Paris embassy would be turning out in force for a Hitchcock retrospective.

The Federation may have surprised itself at the relative ease with which it adapted to life without Langlois. Improvisation, it was decided, was to be no more: the future lay with science and research. A preservation commission was set up to advise members on techniques and try to establish standards, followed by commissions dealing with documentation, cataloguing, questions of film

copyright (this one later disbanded) and, although not until the 1990s, programming. It is through these commissions that FIAF has done much of its most useful work, bringing into play the knowledge of its experts and ensuring that members are kept in touch with the latest developments in areas of considerable technical complexity.

In 1961, a paper of recommendations about archive attitudes to television showed how much of FIAF's thinking was still governed by apprehension about possible industry reprisals. As long as the film companies regarded television as 'a serious and dangerous form of competition', which they clearly did, the archives would have to be extremely circumspect in their dealings with it – they must, in other words, avoid any suspicion that they might be trading with the enemy. 'It is essential that film archives should consider all existing forms of television, without exception, as being commercial or para-commercial activities potentially dangerous to the welfare of the archive, by reason of the fact that in one single irrevocable transmission a film can be shown not merely to a few hundred but to many millions of people.' The many millions might, of course, include people who had rights in the film, even those suddenly reminded of its existence. Television had killed the old exclusivity: films which the archives had jealously guarded, which they had treated as unique, rarities to be shown only to researchers on their own premises or at best at small cinemas under their control, were finally out in the open. It was a radical change.

In 1964, Lindgren produced a paper on the archives then in existence. His premier league, as it were, consisted of the three survivors from the earliest days – London, Paris and New York – plus the archives of Rome, Moscow, Prague and East Germany. There were by then nineteen other archives which he rated as of medium importance, and a further fourteen smaller ones. The movement was still predominantly European, although by the mid-1960s FIAF could already boast that it had members in every continent except Africa south of the Sahara. There were efforts, supported by UNESCO, to persuade a leading African film-making country, such as Senegal, to establish an archive. Over the years further attempts were made, but in terms of a major initiative FIAF regards Africa as its one signal failure. (There are a few very small archives, including one in Angola; the South African archive departed from FIAF during the apartheid years.) FIAF's greatest success in such ventures was its encouragement and support for the Bangkok archive, founded in 1984. The Swedish Film Institute, under its energetic director Anna-Lena Wibom, was much involved with the Bangkok project, although in general it was the East German and Soviet archives which made the running in schemes for Third World expansion. Others were less enthusiastic, feeling that FIAF was trying too hard to perform as a 'mini UNESCO'.

Gosfilmofond, the mighty Russian archive, which at one time boasted a staff of more than 500, had been founded in 1948, though films had been kept in the Soviet Union long before that. No other country has been able to hold on to so large a percentage of its national production, because no other country had a state film industry with such a long and unbroken record. Former Soviet republics, particularly those with their own solid film-making traditions, such as Georgia



International excursions. At Vence in the South of France, 1953. Left to right: Jan van der Vaal (Amsterdam), Ernest Lindgren (London), Hans Wilhelm Lavies (Wiesbaden), Ove Brusendorff (Copenhagen), Mary Meenson (Paris).

and Ukraine, also kept their own films, mistrustful of Moscow even before the break-up of the Soviet Union. And while most West European countries were still coming to terms with the existence of film archives, and state aid was being doled out in miserly dribs and drabs, the 1950s and 60s were the great growth period for the archives of Eastern Europe. Research centres were attached to archives; they had their secure place in the state cinema system. In the late 1950s a document was produced on staffing. Although the actual figures were probably unreliable, the pattern was clear enough: the archives in Warsaw, Budapest and Belgrade each had some 25-30 staff: both the NFA and MOMA listed twelve, Brussels six and Stockholm four.

Funding gradually became less generous for these archives. Eventually the move towards privatisation in Eastern Europe, if it did not threaten their existence, cut back on their staffing and research work. When in the 1970s, for instance, it had looked as though FIAF might have to shut down one of its regular activities, the publication of an international index to film periodicals, the Bulgarian archive offered to pick up the bill to keep the service running. But it was also the Bulgarian archive which in 1992 sent out a sort of sos message in the FIAF Bulletin: 'The National Film Archive of Bulgaria has only one aim now -- to survive physically.'

The great film-making nations of Asia have on the whole shown no major concern about preserving their cinematic history. The Indian archive at Poona, small and modestly funded by the state, has little chance of coping in any adequate way with the output of the world's most prolific and disorganised film industry. And India has a lost heritage which is likely to remain lost, partly because the original negatives were so often used as printing material and so damaged or



At Mo i Rana in the Arctic Circle, 1993. Left to right: Vladimír Opěla (Prague), Gianluca Parinelli and Vittorio Boarini (Bologna), Clyde Jeavons (London). Front: José Manuel Costa (Lisbon).

sacrificed. Hong Kong, which was quick to attach itself to the international film festival circuit, only began in the early 1990s to think about an archive. The Chinese archive in Beijing has of course been subject to enough constraints since it was set up in 1958. In 1988, it recorded that it held some 6,000 features, a modest total for a major nation. But it is Japan, which shows so much regard for its history in most areas of national life, that has probably the most dismal record when it comes to preservation of its films. Most of the nitrate prints and negatives were simply thrown away, and there has been little public support for film preservation in a country where all the concentration has been on advances in electronic image-making.

Mrs Kawakita of the Japan Film Library was one of those who left FIAF in Langlois' wake; the film collection was in any case a small one, although her work in publicising Japanese films throughout the world was of immeasurable importance. In 1992 the Japan Film Centre was in the process of joining FIAF – a somewhat slow business because prospective members serve a kind of probationary period as observers, to ensure that they are able to follow FIAF's many rules. In a slightly woebegone speech at the 1992 Pordenone festival, the Japanese representative could only bewail the 'cultural crimes' of previous generations and promise a fresh start. A mere 4 per cent or less of all Japanese films made before 1945 are known to have survived – and some of those only thanks to the American occupation forces, who confiscated films immediately after the war and later returned them. Much of the destruction of Japan's film history has been blamed on earthquakes and air raids; excuses rather than reasons for a lamentable record, thought the Film Centre spokesman. Meanwhile the Japanese are trawling other countries in the hope of rediscovering some of their own lost past,

making discoveries as far afield as Brazil. And, ironically, they brought to Pordenone a collection of rare *European* silent films, assembled by an enthusiast in Japan during the 1920s. Survival takes strange forms, in strange places.

As FIAF expanded during the 1960s and 70s it had to come to terms with its own future, the question of how exclusive it could afford to be. Both Lindgren and Ledoux took a purist line: there were suggestions that new archives should be independent and autonomous, that they should not be part of any other concern, such as a film institute, which might in some of its activities have been infiltrated by the profit motive. After Lindgren's death, even the status of the NFA came briefly into question, with Ledoux noting that it had been 'even less autonomous than we thought'. But FIAF had either to remain a small, exclusive club or to reckon with a new kind of establishment, archives which had to show films to survive, which had to function as national film centres, and which in many cases had not much of a cinematic past to worry about, so that their thoughts were not dominated by nitrate and the need to preserve it.

All archives, even those most concentrated on preservation work, have also wanted to show their films; they could hardly have done otherwise. Ernest Lindgren, for all his passion for preservation, spoke a great deal about the need for screenings. It was his temperament rather than his principles which made it seem that he felt the proper place for a film was in its can rather than on a screen. But the older archives existed in countries where there were art houses and film societies, established routes to the screening of subtitled, offbeat or not evidently commercial films. Some of the newer archives had to fill all those roles; and to rely on screenings for the income to support whatever preservation activities they could manage. They were, in Lindgren's view, little more than 'cine clubs with film collections'.

Wolfgang Klaue, former director of the East German archive in Berlin, and one of the major enthusiasts for the drive to try to increase FIAF's membership in the Third World, told me that he saw FIAF's 1969 Congress as the time when the clash of generations became evident. Younger archivists had to be steered towards the need to preserve films; it could no longer be assumed that they accepted it automatically. In many cases they would have been hard-pressed to find adequate resources for the most expensive activity, and the one least likely to attract public support. The Federation took the route towards expansion, though without relaxing its non-commercial principles. Have some archives exploited their collections? Yes, probably, Wolfgang Klaue told me. But although archives have been removed from FIAF for failing to keep up their subscription payments, it would seem that there is no record of dismissal for bad behaviour.

The gap between the stronger and weaker archives became evident in the late 1960s and early 70s, during protracted negotiations between FIAF and the all too similarly initialled FIAPF, the International Federation of Film Producers. The notion was that the archives' position in relation to the rights holders should be regularised. In practice, however, it turned out that FIAPF was not yet in a mood to concede much, if anything. The producers' main insistence was that all films deposited in an archive remained the property of the film-makers, with a

suggestion that this arrangement might be extended even after a film's copyright had expired, and that the producers had the right at any time to withdraw any films. Lindgren, characteristically, reacted with splendid hauteur: 'The British government does not give us money to provide what could be free temporary storage at the public's expense.' The producers' underlying assumption, he thought, was the insulting one that 'all archives were irresponsible and untrustworthy, potential criminals and black marketeers, whose activities had to be policed in every clause.' He was willing to concede the producer's right to withdraw a film 'if the archive has misbehaved itself, but not otherwise'. And the National Film Archive, of course, had never misbehaved.

In the long run, FIAF and FIAPE never managed to come effectively to terms. The archives less confident of their position signed the agreement, feeling that they had no choice. The stronger ones held out and refused to sign. It was virtually the last time that the archives needed to take such a stand: industry cooperation, though slow in coming, had arrived generally by the 1980s, though producers still can, and do, remove their films from archives.

All the same, at the 1992 FIAF Congress in Montevideo, Wolfgang Klaue felt it necessary to draw attention to the whole question of the rights and duties of archives, and the still largely unresolved complexities of their legal position. What, he asked, was FIAF's official attitude to Statutory Deposit? Some archives have it, some don't, and it has been consistently opposed by the American producers in particular, who remain suspicious of some form of state intervention. (Though it could be said that the United States has its own form of deposit system, through the need to register films with the Library of Congress for copyright.) Have archives in fact the right they assume to make copies of films, even for preservation purposes? Have they the right to destroy prints deposited with them, even when these have reached the end of their life and become dangerous? Have they the right to make duplicate prints for limited screenings, and do such prints then remain the archive's own property? What precisely is the archives' understanding of film copyright? And so on.

These were the kind of basic questions being discussed in the 1970s by the FIAF copyright commission, which was disbanded because it was felt that there was too much variation in copyright law between countries for it to go beyond the point it had reached. Possibly such questions were raised again in the 1990s because FIAF had recently acquired a programming commission, recognition in effect that programming had become too important an activity to be left to individual members. Perhaps the intention was to remind younger archivists of the need still to go carefully, not to assume rights which may be permitted in practice but which are not adequately defined internationally in law. Film copyright has in any case become much more difficult to enforce since video opened up the possibility for almost anyone to copy almost anything; which does not mean that copyright holders are necessarily less determined to enforce their rights where they can.

The archives' position on all these matters was much strengthened by a UNESCO recommendation of 1980 for the safeguarding and preservation of

moving images, which called for measures for the physical protection of the 'moving image heritage' and for access 'as far as possible' to 'works and information sources. . . which are acquired, safeguarded and preserved by public and private non-profit-making institutions.' Most significantly, the recommendation invited member states to introduce some form of statutory deposit for 'any part or all of their country's national production', although of course leaving open the whole problematic question of how this should be financed. It was also suggested that foreign producers should be encouraged to continue the system of depositing voluntarily 'a copy of moving images of the highest archival quality, subject to all the rights there in'.

Archives, governments and UNESCO do not move rapidly. It had taken UNESCO a long time to work out its recommendation, which embodied many though by no means all the arguments the archives had been putting forward for years. The recognition of the case for statutory deposit was certainly significant, though more than ten years after the recommendation it had yet to be accepted and implemented by many governments, including that of Great Britain. An official recommendation, in the long run, comes down to no more than a recommendation, an assurance of status for the archives, assuming that in 1980 that sort of assurance was still needed.

In 1977, Jacques Ledoux had resigned from his post as FIAF's secretary-general. Officially, he spoke of 'incidents which lead me to state categorically that the Federation is no longer as united as it has been in the past.' Unofficially, he wrote to the NFA of the increasing influence of political considerations. 'I was no longer able to control these conflicts and all I could do was count the blows on both sides.' In effect, Langlois, Lindgren and Ledoux all had their own notions of FIAF and of the kind of archives that should properly be encouraged; and Ledoux, though considerably more of a diplomat, was hardly more of a democrat than Langlois. It was inevitable that the Federation should outgrow its creators; and since 1977 there have been several changes of secretary-general, a move away from the situation in which the office became a long-term power base for an individual.

To celebrate its fiftieth birthday, in 1988, FIAF published an anniversary volume, including a list of its members and observers, with details of their film holdings. This showed not merely the growth of the organisation, but differences in size and scale which must make it increasingly difficult for the Federation to speak, as some would like it to, with a single voice. The largest were the National Film Archive, with 30,000 features, 30,000 short films and 40,000 newsreels; the Bois d'Arcy archives of the Centre National de la Cinématographie (France's national archive since 1968), with 32,000 features and 63,000 shorts; Gosfilmofond, with 22,600 features and 25,400 shorts; and the two biggest American archives, the Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, with 25,000 features and 55,000 shorts, and the UCLA Film and Television Archive, with 30,000 features and long television programmes and 25,000 shorts and short TV programmes. (MOMA's Department of Film, for all its seniority, also retained its exclusivity,



Jacques Ledoux. Courtesy of Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx.

with a mere 4,000 features.) The two major American archives are both in special positions: UCLA on Hollywood's doorstep, the home of collections from many of the major studios and of the Hearst Newsreels Library; the Library of Congress as the place where a film must be registered in the United States to establish copyright. At the other end of the scale came some engagingly tiny archives: Iceland, with 50 features and 950 shorts; Ecuador, with 48 features and 87 shorts; and the Filmoteca Vaticana, the Vatican archive, with 50 features and 1,150 shorts.

For most of the last two decades FIAF seems to have been asking the same kind of questions about its role, while developing the detailed work of its commissions. Should it reflect the range and different interests of its members, and to what extent; should it function as a driving force or as a co-ordinating centre? These are issues which must regularly engage any international organisation, but

for FIAF the questions are complicated by resources barely adequate to even quite modest ambitions.

In many ways, the Federation is a congenially democratic organisation, small enough for most of its members to be on first-name terms and aware of the details of one another's problems, cheerfully extending a kind of family tolerance to elderly members who evidently bring out some well-worn prejudices for regular congress airings. But although in principle all archives are equal, the practice is bound to be somewhat different. Archives which struggle to meet their subscription charges are unlikely to be able to afford the travel FIAF expects of its busiest members – attendance at the annual congresses, the executive committee and commission meetings. The purpose of the congresses is to bring members usefully together, but some of the smaller archives are hardly ever seen and keep in touch only by sending in an annual progress report. The 1992 Montevideo Congress brought out a flock of Latin American archivists, which was plainly the intention, but few of them would probably have been able to follow FIAF to its 1993 rendezvous, a new archiving complex in Norway, in the Arctic Circle. The older and richer archives, which in effect means those from Europe and North America, take the lead as they always have done; though efforts are made, said Eva Orbanz, the present secretary-general, to ensure that there are at least Latin American representatives on the commissions.

The Federation has so little money from its subscription income that it has never been able to afford the luxury, if it's still a luxury, of public relations. Its image, one could say, is not so much low-key as almost non-existent, beyond the people who have direct dealings with it. The central organisation cannot afford to finance the summer schools which provide technical training for young archivists from the Far East and elsewhere. (Moral encouragement, advice and training are seen as FIAF's best aid to its younger members.) The East German archive supported these training programmes while it had the resources; in 1992 the National Film Archive put on an intensive three-week course, but with no assurance that it could be repeated. At the time in the 1990s when archives have come under the heaviest pressure not only to do more but to be seen to be doing it, neither individual members nor FIAF itself have much opportunity for expansion. It seemed appropriate enough that the 1992 congress should find itself discussing the latest technological developments in a building equipped with nothing more advanced than a slide projector.

In British Film Institute circles, the Federation did at one time have a reputation, of a somewhat bogeyman kind. 'I don't think that FIAF is going to like that,' someone would say, and quite often an argument would be stopped in its tracks. This particular ghost was effectively laid by a visit to FIAF's agreeable but very unassuming office in a quiet residential district of Brussels, where a part-time executive secretary, with two part-time aides, conducts the day-to-day business. Brigitte van der Elst, who joined FIAF in 1971, is a model of experienced calm and assurance, but there is none of the front and flash, the corporate image that international organisations like to boast.

Some members would like to see structural changes that would strengthen the

central mechanism: a full-time secretariat, with more authority to take decisions on its own account; a new style of subscription, whereby the archives with the largest budgets would pay a proportionately greater share; perhaps biennial congresses, to encourage a wider spread of attendance. But one thing that one learns about the archive movement is that it is not in the habit of acting quickly, perhaps least of all in matters that concern itself. In any case, an organisation which owes its undoubted character to its dependence on the initiative of its members might not want to change that.

One significant development has been the shift to a far greater openness in relations between archives ('very important, and very new,' said Michelle Aubert). It is not merely that they talk to each other, but that they exchange serious information. Old traditions of secrecy, once so powerful, are said by many to have been virtually abandoned. An archive thinking of restoring a film, for instance, may well use the *FIAP Bulletin* to advertise its intentions and enlist help from colleagues who might have additional material or a different version of the film. If this might seem to outsiders a fairly basic level of co-operation, it is a huge advance on the days when almost all archives preferred to keep information about what films they had to themselves. (And were even encouraged in this by the producers, who could more easily deny the existence of a print; Langlois was a great believer in never telling one company what another had given.) The reason for the difference in attitude is basically that the archives are no longer scared; the surprising thing is that it took them so long to reach this point.

The archivist who takes a particularly firm line on such questions is Michelle Aubert, head of the Archives of the Centre National de la Cinématographie (*CNC*). She worked for many years at the *NFA* in London, indoctrinated in Lindgrenism, accustomed to an arm's length relationship with the British film industry. Returning to France, she found herself in charge of an archive controlled by the official organisation which deals with all film industry matters – and which, incidentally, produces the most enviably thorough cinema statistics. She felt she was in a position to cast aside the old damaging attitudes of defensiveness. She was part of the 'family' of the *CNC*, and there was nothing to stop her using the family connections. In relations with the industry, she would listen to what it wanted and what it expected from an archive, bearing in mind the film-makers' own growing awareness of the need to safeguard their films. 'We work with the grain of the industry, not against the grain.' The *CNC* Archive may be in a rare position to benefit from such relationships, thanks to its combination of easy access to the film trade and a stake in a government policy laid down not merely for the *CNC* as a whole but for its component parts. But archives which find it easy to work with the industry have an undoubted advantage, which seems likely to be increasingly felt.

This may be for the future. Meanwhile, it's enough that the archives do more readily share their information, though they still have to ask for it. There has been no general enthusiasm for any notion of archives publishing complete lists of all their holdings, still less for a computerised *FIAP* database. It may come, Eva

Orbanz told me, but she did not see it as a pressing need. Long before computers, Lindgren suggested some such plan, but he was so conscious of the probity of the NFA that he was never apprehensive about the publication of open lists. Some archivists, however confident in their new attitudes, might still think twice before going so far, still hesitate before admitting just what they have and just how some films were acquired.

Apart from coming together in a general way through FIAF, the archives have also organised themselves into regional groups, including an alignment of Latin American archives. The North American archivists, Mary Lea Bandy said, used to meet mainly at FIAF congresses; now they also get together regularly on their home ground to discuss problems and policies. In Europe, the minds of the archivists have been sharpened and concentrated by the prospect of cash from the LUMIERE project, a part of the European Union's MEDIA programme.

The MEDIA schemes have dealt mainly with various forms of aid to the industry – script development, subtitling, help with distribution for more specialised films, and so on. The countries of the EU share out the administration of the schemes, with LUMIERE going to Portugal. José Manuel Costa of the Portuguese archive presides over a committee of European archivists, with modest EU funds to allocate to specific undertakings. Money is available for film restoration schemes on which two or more EU archives cooperate. (Early ventures included *L'Atlantide*, to be worked on by the French and the Dutch, with a grant of 20,000 Ecus; Joe May's *The Indian Tomb*, bringing together two German archives, the French CNC Archive and 24,700 Ecus; and the work of the pioneer film-maker Alfred Machin, a collaboration between the French, Belgian, Dutch and British archives.) There is also EU support for the training of archivists, for the search for lost European films, and for a very ambitious plan indeed – the compilation of a complete European filmography.

Somewhat optimistically, it is intended that this international effort should be completed by 1995, the cinema's centenary year. The notion is that all films will be listed from the earliest silent days until 1915, and all features from that date to the present, the whole thing to be of course computerised. The data to be recorded will be fairly basic, without including anything like full film credits; and even that is going to take some assembling, not least because of problems of identification, the variations in film titles between different countries, different versions of the same film, questions of co-production and nationality, of when a television film counts as a film. . .

Many of the smaller countries, with the least film production to take into account, already have reasonably complete records of their national production, have indeed somewhat concentrated on national filmographies. Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Portugal apparently lead the way. Italian records, particularly for the silent years, are also quite comprehensive, though this owes more to the initiative of magazines such as *Bianco e Nero* and other unofficial sources than to efforts by the several Italian archives. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, the director of the filmography project, has to hope that the three countries with the most titles to record and the most work to do can be brought up to scratch: France,

Britain and Germany, where the former East Germany has a much better record in cataloguing and general documentation than the West.

It would be a pity, some of the LUMIERE planners argued, to restrict this filmography to the twelve countries of the European Union. Its scope was consequently extended to bring in the other Scandinavian countries and Austria (though not Switzerland, which had registered its lack of enthusiasm for joining the Union). A thorough European filmography will be a remarkable addition to the historical record, a new tool for film scholarship. The next logical step would be to proceed to the listing of archive holdings, establishing the history not merely of what films were made, but of how many have survived, what state they are in and where they can be found. Such projects, once embarked on, have a way of developing their own momentum. But they also call for funding, not merely from the fairly modest amounts put up by the EU but from the archives themselves, or from governments which might be more ready to advance from a LUMIERE launching-pad.

The cinema's hundredth birthday gives archives throughout the world their greatest moment of opportunity. It won't come again, and must be taken. Many people doubt whether cinema, as such, has much of a future, but there can be no question that it has a past, and the custodians of that past no longer have to convince authority – still less the public – about its relevance and worth. FIAF and its members have won most of the theoretical arguments; to go further, they have to find the practical projects that can hope to attract investment. They can persuade us of the need to keep cinema's history, in other words, more easily than they can persuade us of the need to pay for it. To do that, on an international level rather than archive by archive, it may well be that FIAF has first to find more means to pay for itself.